

JUDAISM

Zionism, Israel and World Jewry

David M. Gordis

I.B. Singer and His Predecessors

Lippman Bodoff

Hymns of the Isles

Gabriel A. Sivan

Conservative Rabbis as Ethnic Leaders

Pamela S. Nadell

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Re-nascence of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

A Fresh Look at Zionism

Jewish history, says *David M. Gordis*, has been a series of transformations, and one of the most radical among them is Zionism. With stunning success, it achieved its goal — the establishment of the State of Israel. But if its success is to continue, it must be looked at anew to evaluate its attitude to the millions of Jews living in the Diaspora. “Zionism, Israel and World Jewry: A Reappraisal,” will give considerable food for thought to Jews wherever they may be.

When Fiction and the Essay Converge

“[A]n essay . . . is simply another fiction.” So says Cynthia Ozick in her “Forewarning” to her book, *Metaphor & Memory*, contradicting the usual assumption that it is to be taken more seriously than fiction.. Moreover, writers usually choose one form or the other — fiction or non-fiction. Not so Miss Ozick, who excels in both and, what is more, says *Sarah Blacher Cohen*, there is a linkage which appears frequently between the two. In “The Fiction Writer as Essayist: Cynthia Ozick’s *Metaphor & Memory*,” Professor Cohen traces some of these connections, but — taking a page out of Ozick’s book — ends with the injunction not to take her word for her analysis of the book, but to read Ozick’s work for oneself.

Elijah and his Reputation

Perhaps the most popular guest in the world is the prophet Elijah. He is expected at every Seder — where a special cup of wine awaits him — and he is present at every *brit milah*, where a special chair is set aside for him. He is also credited with being the forerunner of the Messiah. Obviously, he must be a much-beloved personality to be so welcomed. The Biblical picture of him, however, seems somewhat different. As a prophet of the Lord he is far from being kind and gentle. He is stern to all transgressors — including both the King and the people of Israel — and derisive of the prophets of Baal.

How, then, did Elijah get his reputation? According to *Frieda Clark Hyman*, the author of “Elijah: Accuser and Defender,” the answer is that the Jews recognized that “Elijah was a beloved of God,” because his zeal for Him was unique. He needed no commanding, he had no other claims on his life and, therefore, he went up to heaven in a blaze of glory.

Music and Jewish Identity

Arnold Schoenberg is much better known for his contributions to music in the beginning of this century than he is for his adherence to Judaism. He was part of a Viennese world whose Jews assimilated, and

Schoenberg himself was converted in 1897. However, the conversion did not “take,” and Schoenberg remained sensitive to his Jewishness.

As a youngster he had been an avid reader and admirer of the Bible, and that may very well have had a sub-conscious effect on his attitude. Throughout his life he was interested in religion and concerned with moral principles, and these led him, eventually, to write his opera, *Moses und Aron*, in which Zionism, religion and modern life are intermingled. Prior to working on this opera, Schoenberg had manifested his religious interest in a work called *Die Jakobsleiter* (Jacob's Ladder), in which he identified the artistic role with Divine inspiration.

Alison Rose's “A Viennese Interpretation of Moses: Arnold Schoenberg's Jewish Identity” casts an interesting and different light on a fascinating personality.

Another Look at I.B. Singer

Jewish Nobel laureates in literature are still relatively few — three, so far — Agnon, Bellow and I.B. Singer. In “I.B. Singer and his Predecessors,” *Lippman Bodoff* analyzes that author and his relationship to his great predecessors — Mendele, Sholom Aleichem and Peretz — as well as lesser ones, each of whom described *shtetl* life from a different point of view. Singer, he says, is related to them, but his seeming preoccupation with the dark side of the human personality has prevented his critics from seeing that, basically, his fiction is “overwhelmingly shaped by his moral sensibility and his pessimism about man's capacity to cope with the moral challenge of life.” Yet, under the pessimism, there lies Singer's firm belief in free will, and the confidence that religion — particularly Judaism — is the only ultimate answer.

Human Beings Are to Blame

In a good world — as God created it — how can there be evil? *Reuven Hammer's* answer, in “The Biblical Perception of the Origin of Evil,” is that it came into the world with people, with the slaying of Abel by Cain. That was murder, fratricide, a cutting-off of one-fourth of the world's population. People, then, are flawed, they are not perfect and, as we know, God was so disturbed by their wickedness that he wiped out most of them, at one point, saving only Noah and his immediate family. Thereafter, however, God recognized that “the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.” The challenge to mankind is to overcome that kind of imagination and substitute for it a “heart of wisdom.”

Adversity into Poetry

There may very well be “sermons in stones,” and there is history to be learned from the prayer service. In “Hymns of the Isles,” *Gabriel A. Sivan* discusses the *piyyutim* and *kinot*, the liturgical poems and elegies, which were inspired by the cruelties visited upon the Jews of England prior to their expulsion in 1290, as well as by the tribulations heaped upon the Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages. The religious fanaticism engendered

by the Crusades was only one of the many reasons for the vicissitudes. The motivation for the hymns notwithstanding, they enunciate “a longing for Redemption and a spirit of defiant optimism.”

A New Prayer Book

A frequently heard complaint is that we are not as religious as our forefathers. Perhaps so. Perhaps we are not as observant of *mizvot* as some of them were. Perhaps we are not as concerned with the pieties of Jewish life as they were. Nonetheless, there is no dearth of new prayer books. One of the latest, the Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshama*, is enthusiastically greeted and analyzed by *Eric L. Friedland* in “Let Every Living Thing Yah’s Praises Sing.” Contributors to that work have come from many walks of life, and we have here, says the author, a “new, indigenously American *Minhag*.” How successfully it is welcomed by congregations will be the real test of this newest contribution to the Jewish religion.

The Role of Conservative Rabbis

To Conservative Judaism one can safely affix the label, “Made in the U.S.A.” To its rabbis, *Pamela S. Nadell* gives the designation “ethnic leaders,” and analyzes their role in creating an American Judaism by adaptation. Through the creation of new ritual forms, like the *Bat Mizvah*, the production of a succession of prayer books, the interpretation of *halakhah* in various aspects of life, including major areas like the role of women, they have brought into existence a form of Judaism which is not that of our European forebears, because time and circumstances seemed to mandate the changes. The author sees preservation of Jewish ethnicity as a strong, motivating factor. In “Developing an American Judaism: Conservative Rabbis as Ethnic Leaders”, she shows us an important stream of religious evolution on the American scene.

Proud Jew, Proud Frenchman

It is doubtful whether many people outside of France, and probably not many in that country, either, know of André Spire and his role in the early days of Zionism. According to the author, *Sidney D. Braun*, Spire acted as liaison between his government and the Zionist delegation in Paris in 1919 and, in the following year, he went to Palestine with Weizmann on the matter of the border between French Syria and Palestine. Most critics have seen Spire as torn between being a Frenchman and being a Jew, but Braun maintains that there was no discrepancy, as he indicates in the paper “André Spire: Stalwart Champion of Jewish Identity and Pride.”

R.B.W.

Zionism, Israel and World Jewry: A Reappraisal

DAVID M. GORDIS

ANY ATTEMPT TO CHARACTERIZE THE HISTORY of a complex group in one-dimensional terms runs the risk of reductionism and distortion. This is certainly true of Jewish history. Salo Baron warned against the inadequacies of the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history," which viewed the record of the Jewish past as nothing more than a series of devastating catastrophes. Among other things, this limited understanding of Jewish reality ignored the internal intellectual and spiritual life of the people. Purely economic interpretations of Jewish history, and even social histories, are similarly incomplete accounts of the rich and multi-faceted phenomenon of Jewish reality.

Jewish History as a Series of Transformations

It is not only the intricacy of the Jewish experience at any one time that challenges the observer, but, also, the dynamic quality of Jewish reality. Jewish history should be viewed as a series of transformations in the political, intellectual and social conditions of the Jewish people, its internal structures and mind-sets, together with its interrelationships with the larger society. Some of the most tragic and cataclysmic transformations were inflicted on the community from without. However, those transformations which were the product of internal dynamics were often of the greatest fundamental significance, because they represented paradigmatic shifts in the perception of the essence of Judaism and of what community priorities should be. These transformations were sometimes dramatic and visible, at other times they were more subtle. Whatever their nature, it may well be that the only persistent pattern in Jewish history has been that of transformation itself.

The mutability of Jewish history is of more than historical interest. The security and creativity of the Jewish people will depend in the future, as in the past, on its composite ability to maintain sufficient elements of continuity in communal and personal patterns of thought and behavior to sustain a recognizable Jewish character while, at the same time, assimilating change and adjusting to it. A community which ignores change, both within itself and outside, which affects its vital concerns, retains obsolete institutions, preserves outdated slogans, and

DAVID M. GORDIS is Vice-president of the University of Judaism, and director of the Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies.

freezes ideological mind-sets in ways that preclude effective planning and response. All of this produces a pattern of communal decision-making which cannot sustain the community's existence and vitality.

Zionism as a Radical Transformation of Jewish History

The emergence of the Zionist movement represented such a radical transformation of the Jewish people's self-understanding. Its impact on the Jewish community was revolutionary because it offered a new, secular alternative to the earlier traditionalist religious ideologies which had already been undermined by the twin battering rams of Enlightenment and Emancipation. It proffered a new Jewish political theory, one in which Jews were to return to the stage of political history which they once occupied, which differed from their primary role ever since as principals in a purely celestial drama of redemption and messianism. This Jewish version of modern nationalism required a drastically revised Jewish historiography and historiography; history as the playing out of the Divine plan no longer sufficed. Catastrophe could no longer be satisfactorily explained as Divine response to human sinfulness, and redemption could no longer await the Divine reward for the people's return to God's path. Fueled, in part, by the failure of Jewish emancipation and integration to solve the "Jewish problem," Zionism ultimately required of the Jewish People a totally new program, with new structures to implement it.

Zionism was a stunning success in its fundamental objective, the re-establishment of sovereign Jewish national existence in Zion, even though the path was arduous and formidable. The vast majority of the Jewish people were exhilarated by the Zionist vision and motivated to achieve its realization. And not only was the State of Israel created, but, also, her achievements and successes have been remarkable, though at times like these they are too often underestimated or overlooked. By re-establishing Jewish national existence, the Zionist movement empowered the Jewish people and restored it to the stage of world history, both politically and socio-psychologically. In some ways, this radical transformation from powerlessness to power has exceeded all expectations. It was not anticipated that, through the State of Israel, the Jewish People would become a powerful major player in world events.

To this day, the Jewish People has not come to terms sufficiently with this fundamental transformation. To a great extent, the Jewish self-perception remains grounded in a sense of Jewish powerlessness, understandably conditioned by the impact of the Holocaust. Thus, Jewish organizations in the United States spend vast sums on projects related to anti-Semitism, far more than is necessary to maintain vigilance and deal effectively with the problem as it exists in this country. Criticism of individual Jews or of one or another Israeli policy often invokes exaggerated responses from Jewish communal organizations, responses

which seem to reflect a vacillation between an unrealistic self-confidence bordering on triumphalism and an exaggerated sense of helplessness and vulnerability. Nevertheless, the transformation has occurred. The Jewish people must develop a balanced and coherent response to Jewish empowerment if the structure of Jewish life, its agenda and its program, are to be appropriate to its present condition and its potential future.

The Meaning of Zionism After the Establishment of the State of Israel

Following the establishment of the State of Israel, there began the debate over the meaning of Zionism and its continuing relevance after the achievement of its fundamental objective. A program for the Zionist movement was formulated and debated for twenty years before being redrafted and adopted by the 27th Zionist Congress in Jerusalem, in 1968. This "Jerusalem Program" remains current as the only formal, widely accepted statement of the Zionist program.¹ Its five principles are as follows:

1. The unity of the Jewish People and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life.
2. The ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland through immigration from all countries.
3. The strengthening of the State of Israel based on the prophetic values of peace and justice.
4. The preservation of Jewish identity and the unique character of the Jewish people through education in Hebrew language, Jewish culture, and Jewish spiritual and cultural values.
5. The protection of Jewish rights.

The platform is noteworthy both for what it contains and for what it omits. It asserts centrality for Israel but omits reference to the status of the Diaspora. It affirms the principle of the ingathering of the Jewish people, but it is silent over the fundamental question of whether *aliyah* is a personal obligation of every would-be Zionist. It calls for the preservation of Jewish identity, but takes no position on the nature of that identity, a fundamental concern of earlier Zionist ideologists, many of whom viewed the Jewish identity forged in the Diaspora during the period between the Biblical age and the dawn of Zionism as historically aberrant Judaism.²

The omissions are neither accidental nor unimportant, for they spring from a fundamental question about the continued valence of

1. Cited in David Sidorsky, "Interpreting the Diaspora-Israel Relationship," in *Zionism Today: A Symposium* (New York: The Institute of American Jewish-Israeli Relations, The American Jewish Committee, 1986), p. 11.

2. For a discussion of Zionism as a rejection of that Judaism in the writings of such Zionist writers as Herzl and Jacob Klatzkin, and of the opposite view of Ahad Ha'am, see the classic introductory essay in Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York and Philadelphia, 1960), particularly pages 64-72.

Zionism as a movement since 1948. The crux of the matter lies in the meaning of two of the five points: the centrality of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles. The two are interrelated and, in their classical Zionist meaning, are rooted in "*shelilat hagolah*," the "negation" or "rejection" of the Diaspora, implying its denigration. No less a figure than David Ben-Gurion suggested that the Zionist movement in the Diaspora was obsolete, since a Zionism without *aliyah*, even if well intentioned and strongly supportive of Israel, theoretically and ideologically, was empty rhetoric. A Jew who lived in the Diaspora could be a "Lover of Zion," but not a Zionist. A Jew who settled in Israel was a living embodiment of Zionism fulfilled, and needed to deal with problems of building the Jewish state, not with the polemics or politics of an outdated movement. Much has been said since Ben-Gurion on these two related issues, centrality and *aliyah*, but I think it is fair to say that nothing radically new has emerged.

This leads me to suggest that past efforts to re-define Zionism for a State of Israel age have not worked because they have been built on a foundation of unresolved issues. The Jerusalem Program is a good example. Its five paragraphs can be divided into two types: "Zionist" assertions, on the one hand, and Jewish planks on the other. The two fundamental "Zionist" assertions, "centrality" and "ingathering," need to be re-examined and re-cast, and need to become integrated into basic Jewish ideology and programs. Two of the remaining three paragraphs, preservation of Jewish identity and the protection of Jewish rights, are Jewish rather than specifically Zionist tasks. Finally, even the strengthening of the State of Israel, based on the prophetic values of peace and justice, should be taken as a challenge to the entire Jewish people, not limited to a segment which calls itself Zionist.

Re-integrating Zionism into Jewish Life

The discussion of a specifically Zionist program after the establishment of the State of Israel suggests a distinction between Jews who are Zionists and those who are not. But the implied separation between Judaism and Zionism, the suggestion that there is a Jewish approach, as distinguished from a Zionist one, is no longer useful or constructive. I advocate, instead, the integration of the component of Jewish national existence into our broad understanding of Jewish life generally, and the abandonment of the effort to define a specifically Zionist ideology as opposed to a presumed non-Zionist or anti-Zionist one. The unique task of Zionism was to create a Jewish state. This is not to suggest that Zionist ideology did not embrace a range of other objectives, including salvation and regeneration, but the essential instrument for realizing those broader objectives was the creation of the sovereign Jewish state. That task has been accomplished.

It is the task of *Judaism*, rather than of Zionism as such, to supply the ideological, philosophical and theological foundations for Jewish existence throughout the world. Israelis will conduct the affairs of the State of Israel; Diaspora Jews will take responsibility for organizational and political matters in the Diaspora. However, all Jews should participate in articulating modes of positive Jewish attachment and involvement, finding ways to build the connections between Israel and the Diaspora, and among Jews around the world. We should seek to foster Jewish unity without insisting on uniformity, and to nurture the cultural, religious, and intellectual creativity of the Jewish people. These roles must be common to all Jews wherever they live. An empowered but not invincible people, a vulnerable but not helpless people, must adapt from its past and create new instruments and formulations to deal constructively with its new reality.

The Centrality of Israel Re-Examined

Judaism requires the affirmation of the centrality of the land of Israel in Jewish life and the significance of the State of Israel as well. However, the meaning of the "centrality of Israel" must be clarified, and some assumptions must be rejected if it is to be acceptable and meaningful to the Jewish People as a whole. "Centrality" implies, first of all, that the fate of Jews and Judaism is closely related to the fate of Israel, with all other meanings grounded in this assertion. What centrality means, appropriately, is that Israel must play a pivotal role in the life of the Jewish people ideologically, psychologically, and pragmatically. It asserts further, that Israel constitutes a unique mode of Jewish experience and offers possibilities for a kind of Jewish living not available elsewhere. It says also that Israel represents a dimension of Jewish existence which is vital; absent sovereignty in a national state, Jewish existence is incomplete and unfulfilled. Centrality refers also to psychological and sociological importance. It suggests that Israel should be a major focus of concern for Jews and a fulcrum around which a good deal of Jewish organizational life should revolve. "Centrality" affirms that Israel is central to the Jewish people because all Jews have a stake in it and have a proprietary right to it, a right which has been invoked by hundreds of thousands who have escaped from lands of oppression and continue to do so today, and by thousands of others who have opted for *aliyah* for other reasons. It suggests, as well, the Aḥad Ha'am model of a religious and cultural center, a place from which all Jews are nourished spiritually, culturally, and religiously, a place where Jewish culture can develop without the constraints of a larger non-Jewish society imposing itself upon Jewish life, with either hostile or benign intent.

Even momentary reflection suggests that centrality as described has

been achieved to a great extent in contemporary Jewish life. This applies both to those groups in Jewish life who call themselves Zionists and to those who do not. Beyond forming a plank in a specifically Zionist program, centrality of Israel has become a palpable Jewish reality. Much of Jewish organizational life, locally, nationally, and internationally, is Israel-centered. Israel is a central focus of Jewish fund-raising and the dominant feature of Jewish political activism. Israel is a major center of Jewish scholarship, and religious, academic, and communal leadership training programs all include substantial Israel components. Support for Israel and concern for Israel occupy a prominent place in the mind of world Jewry, and this persists without regard to political or strategic vicissitudes. These are not Zionist realities; they are Jewish realities.

In contrast to the above, there is a classically Zionist meaning of the centrality of Israel, but precisely that sense of centrality needs to be reexamined and abandoned, because it is neither historically accurate nor ideologically persuasive: that is the meaning of centrality which suggests that Israel is the *exclusive* arena for the working out of Jewish history, that the Diaspora is both fragile and lacks Jewish authenticity, and that the only legitimate option for the Jew is *aliyah*. This kind of centrality is clearly closely related to the other crucial ("Zionist") paragraph in the Jerusalem Program: the ingathering of the Jewish people. This latter idea has had a complex history in Zionist thought. That history includes the expectations of Herzl and Pinsker that the Diaspora would wither away and disappear rather quickly after the establishment of the State. Klatzkin saw the process as more gradual but no less inevitable. As mentioned above, Ben-Gurion was particularly scornful of the attempt to reformulate a Diaspora Zionism without the element of *aliyah* as central.³ What is common to all the formulations and articulations of the idea is the element of *shelilat hagolah*, the "negation" of the Diaspora referred to above. Either overtly or subtly, Diaspora Jews are accused of characterological and Jewish weakness because they opt to remain in the Diaspora. The emptiness of Diaspora Judaism is supposedly revealed in Diaspora Jews' preference for the fleshpots of affluence over the unique spiritual and cultural fulfillment of Israel.

It seems that, in recent years, it has become fashionable to submerge or camouflage references to this idea. Frequently the argument is voiced that we should "agree to disagree" with our Israeli counterparts on the issue of "denigration of the Diaspora," i.e., to bracket the discussion of this issue in order to minimize the friction that reference to it inevitably generates, and thus to avoid alienation of Diaspora Jews. The suggested diplomacy is motivated primarily by pragmatic considera-

3. See relevant passages from Herzl, Pinsker, Klatzkin, and Ben Gurion, as well as the introductory notes in Hertzberg, *Op. cit.*

tions, because alienation threatens to reduce the level of political and financial support from the Diaspora to Israel. But the issue cannot easily be bracketed, for it is fundamental to the relationship of Israelis and Diaspora Jews, and therefore to the future of the Jewish people. And so the issue must be joined. To the degree that "centrality/ingathering" are embedded in a model of Jewish life which includes *shelilat hagolah*, they need to be rejected as a program for the Jewish People. Therefore, I advocate the dismantling of the specific Zionist program, abandoning those elements of it which are either obsolete or invalid, and "Judaizing" those elements of it which are in fact centrally Jewish rather than uniquely Zionist concerns. It follows that the fact that *shelilat hagolah* is the only substantively "Zionist" inference to emerge from the Jerusalem program, is a reason for abandoning the program altogether. My advocacy of the rejection of *shelilat hagolah* is based on considerations of history, ideology, and pragmatism.

Historical Reasons for Rejecting "Shelilat Hagolah"

Predictions of ingathering as the natural reaction of the Jewish people to the establishment of the State have not materialized on the scale and for the reasons expected by some and hoped for by many more. By and large, only Jews from areas of persecution and oppression have emigrated to Israel in large numbers, and that pattern persists in the currently unfolding dramatic events. While over the years a few tens of thousands of Jews have emigrated to Israel in order to experience Jewish possibilities which were not available to them elsewhere, the overwhelming majority of Jews in Western countries show no interest in *aliyah*. This may be due, in part, to unwillingness on their part to confront the hardships of life in a developing country with acute problems of security and dissension. But there is a good deal more to it than that. Conventional Zionist explanations for the failure of *aliyah* from the West fail to comprehend the ties between Jews and their home countries. Israelis, for example, find it almost impossible to understand that American Jews are not simply grateful to America for its hospitality. Rather, they are patriotic Americans with feelings of love, loyalty, and commitment to the country, based in part on the remarkable opportunities which America has afforded them, but rooted also in shared values, a shared sense of history, and a sense of full participation in all aspects of American life. Similar attitudes prevail among Jews in other Western countries, but America, because of the size of its community and the unique nature of the American experiment, exemplifies a particularly close relationship of American Jews with their country.

The relationship between American Jews and America needs to be seen as an affirmation of America, not a rejection of Israel. I have in mind a reason for the inability of Israelis to come to terms with

the American-Jewish relationship, let alone appreciate it. Israelis view the failure of massive *aliyah* to materialize as a rejection of Israel on the part of American Jews, and therefore a denigration of what Israel constitutes and what it has achieved. *Shelilat hagolah* becomes a defensive stance, a reaction, in part, to what is viewed as *shelilat hamedinah*, rejection of the State. Mutual criticism and defensiveness have become major motifs in Israel-Diaspora conversations. Instead, even though Israelis may be disappointed that mass *aliyah* from the West has not materialized, this development must be integrated in a model of Jewish life which is responsive to reality and attempts to understand it accurately and even sympathetically. The inability of classical mainstream Zionism to come to terms with the affirmative character of Jewish-Diaspora relationships, which in turn reinforces other ideologically rooted attitudes of *shelilat hagolah*, is a destructive vestige of a separatist Zionist ideology which we would do well to discard.

But the historical concerns with *shelilat hagolah* go deeper. They relate to the two issues of security and creative vitality. A common Zionist argument is that security for Jews in the Diaspora is of necessity illusory, and that the only real security for the Jewish people is in the State of Israel. This position may be correct, but it is far from self-evident. There certainly exist no historical precedents to prove it. Tragically, Jewish history is replete with instances of national and communal disaster, and they occurred in sovereign Jewish states as well as in Diaspora communities. We have lost Jewish commonwealths in the past and we have lost Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Undoubtedly, a powerful and proud State of Israel reinforces the sense of Jewish security and strengthens all Jews psychologically in the knowledge that we are no longer powerless even in a military sense. But even the mightiest military powers express fear for their security and, what is more, their fears are not misplaced. With massive destructive force proliferating, the suggestion that the existence of even a powerful Jewish State guarantees Jewish security borders on the absurd. That Israel provides a welcome measure of security to Jews who are threatened is undeniable. That Israel is secure and that the Diaspora everywhere is threatened is certainly not supported by history. The best estimate is that Jewish security in Israel and in the Diaspora will continue to be the product of Jewish vigilance and constructive interrelationships with others who are sympathetic to the security needs of the Jewish people. These interrelationships require both a State of Israel and a Jewish Diaspora in the West.

Finally, there are historical considerations which relate to the creative role of the Diaspora in Jewish life. Classical Zionism emerged because it was seen as the only solution to the constant threats of physical harm and cultural and religious annihilation that Jews faced in the Diaspora. But although it would be foolish to suggest that its tragedies

can be forgotten, the place of the Diaspora in Jewish history needs to be reexamined now. Considered objectively, the conclusion is unavoidable that, along with the dangers and vulnerabilities of the Diaspora, there evolved also a universalization of the Jewish perspective, a dimension that is fundamental to the Jewish character today, wherever Jews live. This perspective is also essential if the Jewish People is to make progress in enhancing the quality of Jewish life and removing the many imperfections which it suffers.

Jewish culture has been enriched immeasurably by the creative interaction of Jews with other civilizations in the Diaspora. Virtually every significant creative product of Jewish history has represented a synthesis of the Jewish internal experience with the culture of others. Even the Bible represents a fusion and transformation of much that the Jewish community absorbed from the earlier Canaanite and northwest Semitic cultures, primarily in the Land of Israel. However, the phenomenon of cultural transfusion was primarily a Diaspora phenomenon. The Talmud provides countless examples of Greco-Roman institutions, concepts, and styles which entered Jewish life during the Hellenistic period. The great flowering of Hebrew poetry in the Middle Ages resulted from the encounter between Hebrew poets and their Arab counterparts. The burgeoning of Jewish philosophy emerged from exposure to Arabic thought and to classical Greek thought through the instrumentality of Arabic translation, and theological categories entered the Jewish mind through the encounter with Christianity. In the contemporary world, Jewish reality is the result of the interaction and confrontation of traditional Judaism with modernism following the Enlightenment. All of these and similar encounters have served to broaden the Jewish vision, to transcend parochialism, and to make of the Jewish people a "world people."

One fundamental characteristic of the Jewish Diaspora experience — "marginality" with respect to the societies and cultures surrounding the Jewish community — carries with it profound blessings along with the obvious dangers. It has allowed Jews to transcend narrow concerns and to understand that national boundaries do not draw limits to the fact that all people, wherever they live, exist in a state of interdependence. This "marginality" has helped the Jewish People to generate universal values, and has afforded it the opportunity to implement them in a wide range of social and political settings. In the past this was mostly the work of Jews who either left the Jewish fold or acted outside of it. However, the American experience, in particular, raises the possibility of Jewish involvement in general societal concerns *qua* Jews, or from a Jewishly informed perspective. In spite of the vulnerabilities and dangers, the historical record certainly does not permit the facile characterization of the Diaspora as aberrational, or sterile. The Diaspora has produced a major and positive dimension of the character of the

Jewish people. Nothing in the historical record suggests that it cannot continue to do so.

Ideological Reasons for Rejecting "Shelilat Hagolah"

In line with the centrality of Israel in its meaning outlined above, the promotion of *aliyah* as a unique Jewish opportunity should become part of the Jewish program generally, not limited to "Zionists." Ideologically, it is necessary to stress the distinction between the encouragement of *aliyah* through formal and non-formal programs of education and public information, and the assertion that *aliyah* is the *only* legitimate Jewish option for those who wish to take part in the drama of Jewish history.

Reference has already been made to the distorted and inadequate view of the Diaspora which attaches to this approach. What is sometimes overlooked is the ideological corollary of such assertions as: "We need you to come to Israel, because otherwise we will become Levantinized," or, "What we need is 'Western' Jews, because if they don't come we are lost." Such assertions create expectations which are both unrealistic and, even more important, unwholesome. They suggest that the solution to Israel's problems is contingent upon the arrival from "outside" of masses of "European" Jews who will remedy the ills of the State and constitute a countervailing presence to its current population with its large and growing number of Jews from Arabic speaking countries. Echoes of this view have been heard in recent arguments supporting the large scale *aliyah* of Soviet Jews now taking place. The suggestion that salvation requires mass immigration from the "West" represents an unacceptably prejudicial view of much of the citizenry of Israel and a Eurocentric vision of what the country should be like. Moreover, the thesis that the solution of fundamental problems in the political, social, and religious areas must await a mass influx of Western Jews suggests that confronting the problems and finding solutions for them can be put off to a different time. Sadly, the last thing that the State of Israel can afford is further delay in confronting its deepest problems.

A second ideological objection to *shelilat hagolah* relates to the centrality/ingathering motif in the context of modern nationalism. The emergence of post-Enlightenment and post-Emancipation anti-Semitism brought about a disenchantment with models of acculturation and assimilation as the solution to the Jewish problem. The record of modern nationalism should generate a similar disenchantment with the idea of nationalism as the solution for the Jewish problem or the human condition generally. The failure of assimilation as a "solution" to the Jewish problem has demonstrated only that the total assimilation of Jews into the larger society was impossible, and that their distinctiveness could not be lost. This was, of course, a mixed blessing, implying both vulnerability and continuity. Nationalism, too, is a mixed blessing, both

promising and threatening. Clearly, the excesses of nationalism do not imply that it is a wholly pernicious pattern of social organization, only that it needs to be balanced by interests and forces which transcend the national interests in order to minimize the risks attendant to it in its extreme and unbridled forms. The catastrophes that history has witnessed as the result of extremist nationalist movements should constitute sufficient warning to those who would view nationalism, in any extreme, as an ultimate solution to the challenge of creating a viable structure of social interrelationships in the world. Current realities in Germany and Eastern Europe illustrate the attractive and unattractive faces of nationalism, and once again Jews are in the middle. With regard to Israel, despite the fact that Jews, tragically, are late arrivals in the world of national states, the warning applies to us as well.

Attempts to defuse or constrain the excesses of nationalism have taken a variety of forms. International organizations are a serious but imperfect approach. Federation and commonwealth arrangements are another; treaties often contribute to a process of internationalization. I suggest that the Israel-Diaspora relationship constitutes a unique instrument for sustaining a broader Jewish consciousness and insuring against the excesses of Jewish nationalism. Diaspora Jewish marginality provides an international perspective within the Jewish community. Israel's centrality in Diaspora Jewish life exposes it to that perspective. The perspectives of Jews throughout the world should be a fertile source for Israel, though, of course, the ultimate decision-making role on matters pertaining to the State of Israel belongs to her citizens.

The relationship is, therefore, mutual. The centrality of Israel in the consciousness of the Diaspora reinforces Jewish identity and guards against the excesses of assimilation; the presence of the Diaspora contributes a dimension to Israeli consciousness which mitigates the risks inherent in parochialism and the excesses of nationalism. I would argue that the Diaspora has played that role in the recent period of uncertainty and tension in Israel, despite the fact that it appropriately claims no right of intervention in the actual decision-making processes of the State.

Pragmatic Reasons for Rejecting "Shelilat Hagolah"

Last but not least, *shelilat hagolah* has not, in fact, encouraged *aliyah*. If anything, the argument has inhibited it, because it has stressed the "radically other" nature of Judaism in Israel as opposed to its continuity with Diaspora Judaism. Orthodox Jews are unaffected by the argument since, when emigrating to Israel, they generally create a life style which is not significantly different from their life style in the Diaspora. But the non-Orthodox Jews most likely to be attracted to the idea of *aliyah* are those who see it as a natural progression from their Jewish commitment in the Diaspora, rather than a rejection or negation of that

commitment. In this they are interestingly and importantly different from the early secular Zionist founders of Israel. The State-sanctioned delegitimization of all but the Orthodox branch of Judaism provides a source of irritation, and thus acts as a further disincentive to those who might consider *aliyah*.

To summarize, then, in the light of past failures, what useful purpose is there in efforts to focus on a Zionist ideology in contrast to a Jewish ideology? In view of the fact that Israel is already a central feature in the life of the Diaspora, and that no new Zionist formulation will suddenly generate mass *aliyah*, why maintain a distinction which serves no purpose other than to divide Jews from one another? Israelis may feel resentment at Diaspora Jews who fail to come to Israel, but why give ideological reinforcement to that resentment when nothing useful can come of it?

Three Settings for Contemporary Jewish Life

My appraisal of contemporary Jewish existence suggests that it is appropriate to view Jewish life as functioning in three distinct contexts: the sovereign Jewish State, the Diaspora homogeneous national state, and the multi-cultural environment. Each of these contexts has its own characteristics, presents its own challenges, and requires its own program. There are tasks which are common to the Jewish communities of all three, but they differ in their capacities to fulfill these tasks.

Israel faces specific Jewish challenges: How should it infuse the modern Jewish State with values and insights from Jewish tradition? Is Jewish tradition to be granted authority in some areas under Jewish sovereignty? If so, which aspects of the tradition, and as understood by whom? Working out the relationship of contemporary realities to traditional norms is a unique, troublesome, but ultimately exciting and invigorating challenge for Israel, comparable to the need to balance security needs and the exercise of power with democratic, humanistic, and religious values.

Diaspora Jewish existence in the homogeneous national state comes closest to approximating the conditions which gave birth to Zionist solutions. Jews remain outsiders in societies in which there is a dominant religious, national, or ethnic majority. Under these circumstances, the presence of Jews represents at the very least a potential irritant, with possibly disastrous implications. The fundamental task for Jewish communities in these countries is to negotiate maximum conditions of security and rights of free expression, and to navigate between extremes of assertiveness and accommodation, isolation, and assimilation. Emerging virulent nationalisms in Eastern Europe are a case in point. Here, *aliyah* must be considered with particular seriousness. Even where the present moment appears non-threatening, the classical Zionist projec-

tion of ultimate instability and danger appears most convincing for Jewish communities of this type.

The multi-national, multi-cultural setting is the most significant new setting for Jewish existence. There appear to be important and relevant differences between this setting — of which the United States is the outstanding example — and the homogeneous national state. While this country of ethnic, religious, and national minorities is not without intergroup tensions, anti-Semitism in the United States appears to be different from classical anti-Semitism in that it is not predominantly rooted in Christian theological doctrine, nor does it demonize or dehumanize Jews. Anti-Semitism in the United States appears to be primarily the characteristic product of intergroup rivalry exacerbated by Jewish success and prominence.⁴ The election of Jews to high office in districts where few Jews live, Jewish participation as Jews in public forums in the United States, and even the high rate of intermarriage, which is a serious problem for American Jewry but which, at the same time, is an indicator of their acceptance, all suggest that the principal challenges to Jewish continuity in the United States are internal, that is, they relate more to the choices and decisions which Jews themselves make about their Jewishness than to the operations of external forces upon them.

While the United States is the most extraordinary example of the multi-national, multi-cultural environment, it is interesting to refer at least briefly to two newly emerging settings, radically different from one another and perhaps diametrically opposite in the prognosis regarding their potential for a secure Jewish life in their midst: Western Europe and the Soviet Union. Europe, until recently, was the best example of homogeneous national states, where the dominance of a single national group projected the Jews as outsiders and contributed to the catastrophic virulence of anti-Semitism. Western Europe is currently moving to a mitigation of nationalist elements through the linking of economies and the weakening of national boundaries. The international dimension of political consciousness is bound to grow, and will interact with the continuing modes of national expression, language, literature, and culture. It will be interesting to observe the impact of this change on European Jews, especially in France. Will the emergence of this kind of internationalist-nationalist model create greater opportunities for Jewish cultural development? How will it affect the Jewish self-image which, in Europe, seems still very much in tension with the homogeneous national environment?

The Soviet Union remains one of the most interesting and important enigmas of all. The present agonies of the Soviet Union are both

4. See the interesting discussion of the variety of phenomena which have been described as anti-Semitism by David Sidorsky, "Against the Idea of Antisemitism: Agenda Priorities, Empirical Disagreement, and Conceptual Issues," in Yehuda Bauer, ed., *Anti-semitism, Proceedings of the Vidal Sassoon Center for the Study of Antisemitism* (Jerusalem, 1988).

promising and threatening for Jews. No one knows what will happen to the country generally, and few would dare to predict whether recent new options for Jewish self-expression for Soviet Jews represent the beginning of a new phase of Jewish life or are momentary blips on the historically descending curve of Jewish life there. The answer may be linked to the model of nationalist expression which emerges in the Soviet Union. A country of this size and diversity, which nurtures the free expression of its component groups, may nurture the rights of cultural and political expression of its Jews as well. At the same time, however, emerging nationalisms in the Soviet Union contain dangerous and exclusionary components.

To summarize my thesis, I suggest that the maintenance of a separate "Zionist" ideology, as distinct from a program for Jewish life generally, preserves an outdated and divisive formulation within the Jewish community. The debate about *aliyah* is a legitimate one, but need not be embedded in an ideological distinction which suggests either that Israel not be a central concern for all Jews or that Diaspora life is inherently reprehensible.

The responsibility for protecting Jews, insuring Jewish rights, nurturing Jewish identity, and helping those who choose *aliyah*, is not limited to a certain group of Jews, namely Zionists, with the rest of the Jewish people relieved of these responsibilities. At the same time, for historical, ideological, and pragmatic reasons, *shelilat hagolah* needs to be rejected, and the notions of "centrality of Israel" and the "ingathering of the Jewish people" need to be adjusted to new realities. Israel and the Diaspora should not view their interrelationship in competitive terms. Neither should be promoting its virtues by denigrating the other, and neither should bolster its sense of security by exaggerating the insecurities of the other.

An adjustment of Jewish ideology to the realities of Jewish life today is necessary. We need to inquire anew into the complex nature of Jewish identity. The current crisis in Eastern Europe will pass. I sense that, eventually, we will be less and less able to generate Jewish energy on the basis of the perceived hostility of others. Nor will Jews around the world be energized by ideologies which are contradicted by history, unacceptable to them morally, and pragmatically ineffective. We need to dismantle structures which inhibit the process of identifying new modes of interrelationship among Jews and between Jews and Judaism. A post-Zionist model for contemporary Jewish life requires an appreciation of the variety of settings in which Jews live, a patient but rigorous probing of the Jewish condition, and imaginative programs for nurturing the creative energies of our communities and promoting their interrelationship.

The Fiction Writer as Essayist: Ozick's Metaphor & Memory

SARAH BLACHER COHEN

TRY TO "POSSESS ONE GREAT LITERATURE, at least, besides (your) own: and the more unlike (your) own, the better." So cautioned the critic Matthew Arnold. Years later, author Cynthia Ozick heeded his advice. Over the course of time she has populated her house of fiction with three mind-stretching novels and four collections of riveting short stories. To keep her fiction company, she has brought in a rich assortment of provocative essays to share the premises. In the preface to her 1983 collection of essays, *Art & Ardor*, she informs us how she happened to write these departures from fiction:

I have written over one hundred essays — some in the form of articles or fugitive pieces, others to serve a public occasion ... three or four out of political necessity, as forays into advocacy journalism ... the rest an outgrowth of reading and reviewing. ... Most ... out of unashamed print-lust. ...

She bemoans the fact that she was an unknown free-lancer, a literary orphan with no benevolent god-parents to sponsor her in the world of letters. Her essays, she claims,

were written on quicksand without a place to stand: no regularly supportive periodical, no professorship, no body of learning, no assurance, no early mark made for oneself.¹

Now, with her 1989 collection of essays, *Metaphor & Memory*, Cynthia Ozick, a Guggenheim fellow and recipient of the Straus Living Award from the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters, can no longer claim she is a literary nobody, that her writing of essays is a trivial pursuit. While in the past she complained that readers paid too little attention to her essays, she now fears that people are taking them too seriously. She worries that her readers will "unfailing trust the veracity of (her) non-narrative prose."² Good Jew that she is, she doesn't want the profane utterances in her essays to be accorded the same reverence bestowed upon the holy pronouncements from the foot of Sinai. As essayist, she doesn't want to assume

1. Cynthia Ozick, "Foreward," *Art & Ardor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), p. x.

2. Cynthia Ozick, "Forewarning," *Metaphor & Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. ix.

SARAH BLACHER COHEN is Professor of English at SUNY, Albany, and the General Editor of the SUNY Press Series on Modern Jewish Literature and Culture.

the lofty mantle of a "reliable witness," a "committed intelligence, a single-minded truth-speaker."³ In other words, she makes no hubristic claim to be the fashioner of Halakhah, authoritative Jewish law. Rather, she contends that her essays are laced with the *aggadic*, the inventive, the conditional, the subjective, even the poetic. Their subject matter is filtered through the kaleidoscope of her mind and takes on provisional shapes and hues. In such a protean state, they avoid the predictable and espouse the surprising. Therefore, she contends that there is no essential difference between her essays and her stories and novels, since they are all fictitious or "made-up in response to an excited imagination."⁴ But, according to Ozick, what is doubly fictitious about the essay is that it attempts to pass for true belief.

In addition to possessing this shady fictionality, her essays, she claims, are like light bulbs which illuminate for a brief span of time, leaving us in the dark until she comes up with different replacements for them. She insists, therefore, that they not be mistaken for fixed, steady beacons lighting up the hidden corners of her fiction. Or, to switch metaphors, she maintains the hope that her essays not be "seized as a rod to beat the writer's stories with; or as a frame into which to squeeze the writer's stories; or collectively, as a 'philosophy' into which to pen the writer's outlook."⁵

Yet who is to say that her cautionary foreward, itself a miniature essay, in *Metaphor & Memory*, is to be trusted? Ozick, as author, might very well be a conscious liar, an artful deceiver. Or she may unwittingly not be telling the truth about the connections between her essays and her stories. In either case, it is advisable to heed D.H. Lawrence's advice to "Trust the tale, not the teller of the tale." Some of Ozick's essays in *Metaphor & Memory* do contain vital clues about some of her fiction, do articulate its ideational core. Conversely, in several instances the hobby horses that she rides in some of her stories go coursing through her essays, often without much disguise and with equal force.

The most obvious kinship between essay and story exists between her lengthy piece "Sholem Aleichem's Revolution" and her magisterial novella, "Envy; or, Yiddish in America." The former expresses formal, academic admiration for the *Mame Loshon*, mother tongue, which she describes in her nonfiction as a "direct, spirited and spiritually alert language . . . rooted in the quotidian lives of ordinary folk."⁶ The latter exudes a doting mother's affection for her precious child: "His Yiddish . . . still squeaked up to God with a littleness, a familiarity, an elbo-poke, it was still pieced together out of *shtetl* rags, out of a baby *aleph*, a toddler

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. xi.

5. Ibid.

6. Cynthia Ozick, "Sholem Aleichem's Revolution," *Metaphor & Memory*, p. 173.

beys. . . .”⁷ But both works also trace the hostile reception accorded to Yiddish, especially by the intellectuals who regarded it as “a *zhargon*, Gibberish prattle, a subtongue, something less than a respectably cultivated language.”⁸ In her essay, however, Ozick painstakingly shows how Sholem Aleichem legitimized the bastard Yiddish, invented a distinguished lineage for it, and elevated it to a place of honor, causing it to be translated by gifted literati like Hillel Halkin. Conversely, in her novella, Ozick painfully recounts the absence of translators for poor Edelshtein, the 67 year old Yiddish poet *manqué* who, in unresponsive fancy synagogues, conducts funerals for the deceased language and the world that it served. Yet, both works share a fundamental similarity. Though one is an elegy and the other a celebration, Ozick has, through her meticulous research and formidable power of invention, saved and revitalized Yiddish for us.

A less obvious linkage exists between Ozick’s essay, “Primo Levi’s Suicide Note” and her story, “Rosa.” Both deal with Holocaust victims, one fictive, one real, who were imprisoned in the “place without pity,” suffering the major torments of the *Shoah* experience: Nazi brutality, freezing, starvation, merciless selections, barbaric slaughter of loved ones, abject powerlessness. Both victims were subjected to the continued hell of the post-Auschwitz world. For them, the injury “extends through time, . . . and the Furies perpetuate the tormentor’s work by denying peace to the tormented.”⁹ However, until his last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi did not lash out at his tormentors; he refrained, as he says, from trading “blows” with his external oppressors. As chemist-chronicler of the seething Holocaust cauldron, he was the detached spectator of the infernal brew, clinically examining the severity of contagion. Because the persona that appeared in the majority of his writing was devoid of anger, “violent feeling, or any overt drive to ‘trade blows,’”¹⁰ Ozick speculates that he had a dormant rage of resentment which, forty years later, ultimately erupted and turned inward, leading to his self-destruction.

Rosa was also consumed with violent rage, which she initially suppressed. By stuffing her baby’s shawl in its mouth, she silenced her shrieks of protest against the Nazi murder of that baby, Magda. But thirty-five years later, when Rosa is in this country, she unleashes her fury. She “trades blows.” In Brooklyn she smashes her antique store because American customers are uninterested in her antiquated Holocaust past. She lashes out at a Jewish hotel manager for having “barbed

7. Cynthia Ozick, “Envy; or, Yiddish in America,” *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 51.

8. Cynthia Ozick, “Sholem Aleichem’s Revolution,” pp. 174-175.

9. Cynthia Ozick, “Primo Levi’s Suicide Note,” *Metaphor & Memory*, p. 35.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

wire on top of (his) fences,"¹¹ for abandoning her in the past and excluding her in the present. She burns Dr. Tree's wooden treatise, *Repressed Animation*, a reductive psychological study of Holocaust survivors. Unlike Primo Levi, she turns her rage outward and, by degrees, gets its poison out of her system. She puts to rest the ghost of her dead child which haunts her. Ending her isolation, she reconnects her telephone and waits to greet the embodiment of the ordinary, Mr. Persky, the button salesman.

Of course, one can make only so many comparisons between Rosa and Primo Levi. One is a fictional character whose fate Ozick controls, and the other is a real live character whom a different creator controls. Would that Ozick had been able to write a different ending for Primo Levi's life. But she does present a revised interpretation of his life through her unsettling analysis of his last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, "a book of catching up after decades of abstaining . . . a book of blows returned by a pen on fire."¹² By having Rosa give full vent to her retaliatory passion against Holocaust and post-Holocaust barbarity, Ozick advocates unrepressed animation when confronting savagery.

In "Primo Levi's Suicide Note" and "Rosa," Ozick applies her version of Hebraism, which posits that literature "should not only be, but mean."¹³ To corroborate her position, she draws upon "Judah Halevi, who accused Hellenism of producing 'flowers without fruit', in contrast to the Jewish spirit, which bears the ripe fruit of responsibility and judgement."¹⁴ Ozick explores the seduction of flowers over fruit and its consequences in her essay, "S.Y. Agnon and the First Religion," and her story, "The Pagan Rabbi."

In her analysis of Agnon's tale, *Edo and Enam*, she writes of a one-eyed yeshivah student, Gamzu, forsaking the study of righteous conduct in the *Shulhan Arukh* for the lure of exotic flowers and pagan songs performed by the beautiful enchantress, Gemulah, outside the Land of Israel. In her native country she is a mesmerizing oracle, one of the minor goddesses of the First Religion. When Gamzu weds her and brings her to live in Jerusalem, she becomes near mute and distraught, and the holy city is contaminated by her heathen presence. There is a mass exodus from it, the houses collapse, hatred and suspicion are unleashed. There is a rash of unexplained murders and deaths. Even the philologist, Dr. Ginath, obsessed with capturing the elusive beauty of her mysterious language, is a fatal victim of her charms, falling off a rooftop in his fruitless pursuit of her. Thus, Agnon is saying that the pagan, with its many enticements, and the monotheistic, cannot co-exist in Jerusalem, the city of the Law. The man of science, Ginath,

11. Cynthia Ozick, "Rosa," *The Shawl* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. 51.

12. Cynthia Ozick, "Primo Levi's Suicide Note," p. 46.

13. Cynthia Ozick, "Bialik's Hint," *Metaphor & Memory*, p. 223.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

is punished for his intellectual pursuit of false goddesses. However, Gamzu, still wearing his *yarmulka*, and exerting the discipline to muffle Gemulah's song, lives. The First Religion is banished and Jerusalem regains its spiritual supremacy.

Near the end of her essay, Ozick questions her own incisive interpretation. She wonders whether Agnon is "finally on the side of lyrical sorcery or Torah," since the Enamite hymns are praised for their "grace and beauty."¹⁵ Such uncertainty does not prevail in her own story, "The Pagan Rabbi." Like Gamzu and Dr. Ginath, her protagonist, Rabbi Isaac Kornfeld, a Talmudic scholar of "piety and brains," is seduced by the beguiling world of nature to scale the Fence of the Law to become its pagan worshipper. Choosing Pan over Moses, he knows that his pantheism is a form of idolatry. Yet he still prefers the verdant tree of beauty to the unadorned tree of knowledge. And, for a time, he becomes an unfettered creature of the woodland, as opposed to the shackled occupant of the study and synagogue. But, just as Dr. Ginath's enchantment with the vocal sorceress, Gemulah, proves to be his fatal attraction, so Rabbi Kornfeld's affair with a tree dryad, Iripomonoeia, whose "sexual portion" is as "wholly visible as in any field flower,"¹⁶ leads to his undoing. According to the story's epigraph, which Ozick has chosen from *The Ethics of the Fathers*, "He who is walking along and studying, but then breaks off to remark 'How lovely is that tree!' or 'How beautiful is that fallow field!' — Scripture regards such a one as having hurt his own being."¹⁷ Similarly, Isaac Kornfeld, distracted by nature, "hurts his own being" in that he hangs himself in his prayer shawl to return permanently to the earth's embrace. But the dryad is not there for him, and his suicide is in vain. Yet Ozick elicits a modicum of sympathy for the scholar who desires to become a noble savage, at one with the natural universe and seeing creation with original eyes, though she ultimately rejects Kornfeld's nature-loving Hellenism for his observant widow's law-revering Hebraism. Just as the Prophets recognized the Israelites' attraction to the heathen and reproached them for whoring after false gods and foreign idols, Ozick recognizes the appeal of natural beauty and, through this story, warns modern-day Jews of the injurious effects of choosing pagan esthetics over Jewish ethics and spirituality.

Clearly, the ideational content of Ozick's story, "The Pagan Rabbi," published in 1966, has spilled over into her 1987 essay, "S.Y. Agnon and the First Religion," and her interpretation of Agnon's tale, *Edo and Enam*, published in 1950. Since she claims that she only recently read *Edo and Enam*, we can make one of two assumptions. Either she superimposed her fictional working out of the struggle between Pan

15. Cynthia Ozick, "S.Y. Agnon and the First Religion," *Metaphor & Memory*, p. 222.

16. Cynthia Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories*, p. 30.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

and Moses or Hellenism and Hebraism from *The Pagan Rabbi* onto her interpretation of Agnon's work, or she and Agnon had independently been grappling with giving expression to the Jewish idea of anti-idolatry in their respective stories. I suspect that, as self-defined Jewish writers, steeped in Jewish learning, they were giving fictional form to one of the most over-riding concerns of Hebrew scriptures: the lure of, and resistance to, graven images.

In the concluding lines to her "Forewarning" of *Metaphor & Memory*, Ozick writes that she repudiates the

inference that a handful of essays is equal to a *Weltanschauung*: that an essay is generally anything more than simply another fiction — a short story told in the form of an argument, or a history, or even (once in a great while) an illumination ...¹⁸

There are essays in *Metaphor & Memory* which are *illuminations*: "Bialik's Hint," containing her prophetic literary credo, "Ruth," her luminous reading of Hebrew Scripture, and the title essay, "Metaphor & Memory," originally the 1985 Phi Beta Kappa Address at Harvard University, to name just a few. But since you are reading my own miniature essay, I caution you to distrust it. I may be lying. Read Cynthia Ozick's *Metaphor & Memory* for yourselves!

18. Cynthia Ozick, "Forewarning," *Metaphor & Memory*, p. xii.

Elijah: Accuser and Defender

FRIEDA CLARK HYMAN

THE PERSONALITY OF ELIJAH IS CENTRAL to Jewish folklore. In most of the tales he appears as a savior, one who assists the threatened, the oppressed, the poor. Because he could fly so swiftly,¹ his celerity being exceeded only by that of Michael and Gabriel (and in time of plague, by the Angel of Death), he could reach the needy in time. Usually, his identity was discovered after he had vanished.

But not only were the distressed helped. Scholars, also, were his concern. At times he was their teacher, at others, their pupil. For thirteen years he was supposed to have taught R. Eliezer ben R. Simon. *Talmidei hakhamim* (scholars) consulted him about the Heavenly *Bet Din* (court), or about God Himself. The oft-found talmudic phrase, *Teiku*, is an acronym for the statement that "Tishbi" (Elijah) will answer the unresolvable halakhic disputes when he reappears. After the seminal debate at Yavneh between Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and the Sages, Elijah revealed to Rabbi Nathan how God had laughed and exclaimed: "My sons have prevailed against Me."² His favorite *tanna* (talmudic scholar of the mishnaic period) was Joshua ben Levi.

On the other hand, he learned from scholars. Citing an apologue of Rabba bar Shila, Elijah demonstrated how Rabbi Meir's relationship to his former teacher, *Aher*, (signifying "other," for an atheist apostate), did not alienate him from Torah.³ As a result, interpretations of Rabbi Meir became acceptable in the Celestial Yeshivah.

For mystics he was invaluable. He was credited with inducting Simon bar Yohai and his son into the secrets of the Torah.⁴ Abraham ben Isaac of Narbonne, author of *Sefer ha'Eshkol*, his son in law, Rabad, and Jacob Nazir, were singled out as men who attained "a revelation of Elijah" — that is, a mystical experience of spiritual awakening through which something novel was revealed.⁵ Elkanah,⁶ author of *Sefer*

1. B. *Berakhot* 4b: A *tanna* taught, Michael reached his goal in one flight (without having to rest at all); Gabriel in two (stopped to rest once); and Elijah in four (rested thrice).

2. B. *Baba Mezia* 59b.

3. B. *Hagigah* 15b: Aher's (Elisha ben Abuya's) instruction was compared to a pomegranate. Meir savored its content, but discarded the peel.

4. *Zohar Hadash, Ki Tabo*.

5. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Quadrangle / N.Y. Times Book Co., 1974), p. 43.

6. He was known as Kanah Abengedor, son of Nahum of the Ram family. He also called himself Elkanah son of Jeroham, son of Avigdor of the Ram family. *Sefer ha'Kanah* is an explanation of the 248 mizvot. *Sefer ha'Peli* contains observations on Creation and the Decalogue (see *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII [Bloch Philipp, 1906]).

FRIEDA CLARK HYMAN is an author who is now living in Jerusalem.

ha'Kanah and *Sefer ha'Peli*, was taught by his grandfather, Elijah, and other Heavenly Beings.

Elijah performed the same function in Safed for Rabbi Isaac Luria (the "Ari"), the 16th century founder of Lurianic Kabbalah in Safed.⁷ More, he announced the birth of the Ari to his father, and cautioned him not to begin the circumcision until he, Elijah, permitted it.⁸ This same announcement was supposed to have been made to the father of the Ba'al Shem Tov (the "Besht"), the founder of Hasidism.

Once, however, he went too far. Unto Rabbi Yehudah, the redactor of the Mishnah ("Rabbi"), he revealed the means of forcing the arrival of the Messiah. Indeed, so reckless was this that he was punished with sixty flaming lashes. To compensate for this dangerous disclosure, Elijah had to assume the form of a fiery bear and disperse the congregation Rabbi had assembled.⁹ Not only in this aggadah is fire highlighted, but also in the book of Kings fire is a frequent prop of Elijah's experiences.¹⁰

His standard for human conduct was extremely high. That a deed was halakhically correct was not sufficient justification for him; scholars had to go beyond the letter of the Law. Thus, he refused to meet with the Babylonian Amora (scholar of the Gemara period), Rav Anan, because the latter had recommended a petitioner to another judge, thereby, inadvertently, undermining the position of the other party to the dispute.¹¹ A friend who built a vestibule to his house incurred his wrath because the voice of the poor could barely penetrate beyond this new entrance to the interior.¹²

On the other hand, his judgments were often astonishingly lenient. For example, he pointed to two jesters who would definitely inherit paradise. Why? Because with their jokes they had banished worry from the hearts of men.¹³ His love engulfed a disparate group of men: prison guards, comedians, farmers, scholars, mystics. Thus, legend enshrined him in the heart of Israel.

But why? Certainly, Scripture portrays no engaging personality. Indeed, of all the characters of the Tanakh, he is hardly the gentlest or the kindest. On the contrary, he is a stern, demanding, even autocratic figure. For years he was relentless, not only to his fellow man, but to God Himself, as we shall see.

He appears suddenly in the book of Kings, with no introduction. We don't even know his father's name. According to Obadiah, King

7. Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* (J.P.S., 1945, Second Series), pp. 255-256.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 252-253.

9. B. *Baba Mezia* 85b.

10. 1 Kings XVIII:38; 2 Kings I:10-12; 2 Kings II:11.

11. B. *Ketubot* 105b-106a.

12. B. *Baba Batra* 7b.

13. B. *Ta'anit* 22a.

Ahab's chief steward, he disappeared just as precipitously.¹⁴ All we are told is that: "Elijah the Tishbite who was of the settlers of Gilead said unto Ahab: 'As the Lord, the God of Israel lives before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.'"¹⁵ Clearly, he was hardly a bearer of good tidings. Moreover, no reason for this national punishment is given. But it becomes obvious as the action progresses that the prophesied drought is punishment for the faithlessness of Israel, for the worship of the *Baal* and the *Ashe-rah*, gods of the surrounding civilizations. The phrase "according to my word" is unclear. Whose word? God's? Elijah's? The answer, however, is implicit in the very same chapter; twice we read it: "... according to the *word of the Lord* which He spoke by Elijah" (1 Kings, XVII:16), and at the end of the chapter in verse 24, after Elijah breathes new life into the mouth of a dead child, "... the *word of the Lord* in your (Elijah's) mouth is truth" (emphasis added).

This last statement, that of the widow of Zarephath, seems fatuous. All of these years the widow and her son had been kept alive by Elijah through the miracle of the never-spent jar of flour and cruse of oil, while around her death stalked her neighbors. Indeed, she had prepared herself and her child for death when Elijah first came to her. Granted, the incident which prompted her remark was the restoration of her son to life after he had fallen sick and appeared to have died. Granted, too, that Elijah had revived him. But Elijah had been sustaining them in the midst of the famine since he arrived, yet, strangely, it was only now that she knew that he was a genuine man of God.

However, the allusions are clear. The word is God's; its articulation is man's, Elijah's. A midrash of *Seder Elyahu Rabba* (17,18) supplies us with a vivid and poetic description of this power. On Mt. Carmel, before Elijah calls down the celestial fire for his sacrifice, he orders his steward, Elisha, to pour water over his hand. No sooner does Elisha obey, than water continues to flow out of Elijah's fingers, drenching everything: bullock, wood, stone, earth, trench. Surely there can be no more explicit statement about the ability of Elijah to restore the moisture of the land.

But even if we were not conversant with this midrash, nor aware of the hints within the text, we would soon realize that Elijah had been invested with this life-giving power by God Himself. Elijah, and Elijah alone, can command the dew and the rain.

Let us examine the saga step by step. Elijah has declared that there shall be neither dew nor rain, but according to his word. And this is exactly what ensues. So much so, that the brook Cherith on the eastern side of the Jordan, the brook from which he drinks, evaporates. Why? Because of the drought, we are told. Hence, God sends him to Zare-

14. 1 Kings XVIII:12.

15. Ibid., XVII:1.

phath, a satellite of Zidon, where a widow will sustain him: a dramatic contrast to the man who is to become not only the widow's sustainer, but, in folklore, a sustainer of Israel.

Leaving Israel for Zarephath is an extreme step; abandoning Israel is always that. More so, when there were other possibilities. For God could have ended the drought. Or, He could have sent Elijah to the western side of the Jordan. Why exile him? And why to a city of Zidon, the birthplace of Jezebel, his avowed enemy?

However, God could not stay the drought, only Elijah could. Then why didn't he do so? Because that was not in character; not because of his own thirst would he bend. Then why didn't he cross the Jordan? Water was not scarce there. How scarce could it have been if Obadiah could supply one hundred prophets with bread and water during this very period? (1 Kings XVIII:13). Then how does it happen that the brook Cherith dried up if the streams still flowed on the western side of the river? Because it had been singled out thus; as the wind that threatened only Jonah's ship and no other, so this brook, and this brook alone, had to disappear to pressure Elijah. A thirsty man might command the rain. But not an Elijah, not one so zealous for the Lord.

Moreover, the western side of the Jordan could have cost him his life. Ahab's agents were searching for him, this "Troubler of Israel." Indeed, this manhunt, according to Obadiah, extended beyond the borders of Israel. Then what shelter could Zarephath offer? Obviously, Zidon had already been explored. Besides, what reasonable mind could imagine this kingdom a haven for the unswerving enemy of a Zidonian princess?

The first request that Elijah makes of the widow is for water. Refreshed, he then asks for bread. This, however, gives her pause. She has but a handful of meal and a spot of oil with which she intends to make a cake for herself and her son, after which, she adds, she and her son will die. This matter of fact conclusion is more chilling than any description of famine could be. Elijah, however, assures her that she and her son will have plenty. She has her misgivings, but she obeys: she provides for Elijah before she feeds her boy. For there is something in this "hairy man, girt with a girdle of leather about his loins," and covered with a hairy mantle (2 Kings I:8), that convinces her. And she is rewarded: she and her son eat from an unending supply of flour and oil.

An idyllic picture? Hardly. For to eat abundantly in the midst of famine can be decidedly uncomfortable. Yet the fact is that Elijah, the widow, and her child, have enough while neighbors go hungry. To be sure, the widow can do nothing about her neighbors. Elijah, however, chooses to do nothing.

It is upon this snug domestic scene that tragedy strikes. The child becomes ill, mortally ill, "no breath is left in him." With this blow, the

widow turns upon Elijah. Forgotten are the provisions that have kept her and her boy. Her son is dead! Bitterly she upbraids Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to recall my sins, and to slay my son?" (1 Kings XVII:18). What can she mean? Is it Elijah's presence that has made her more vulnerable before God, she who has so patently benefitted from his arrival? But if her accusation puzzles, what shall we make of Elijah's protest: "O Lord my God," he cries, "have You also brought evil upon the widow with whom I live, by slaying her son?" (1 Kings XVII:20).

Both outbursts, however, are not bizarre at all. For the widow, a man of God must perforce evoke a supernatural ambience. Simple woman that she was, she preferred not to be singled out by Divinity — exactly as most pagans believed. Appease their gods, yes, but don't make yourself too conspicuous. Therefore, for all that she had been kept alive by this boarder, she now realized that, at the same time, she was marked by this guest. And as is frequent when one is chosen by Divinity, it was for grief. The price of the food she had eaten, she concludes, was her son.

Elijah, however, understands more. How can he not? He is hardly unaware of the plight of the populace. Had he not come upon the widow when she had been preparing for death from starvation, her own and her son's? That Israel was in the same dire straits he also knew; indeed, he had to know that their straits were even more acute, after years spent in Zarephath. Nevertheless, he had done nothing, he who could have called forth the dew and the rain.

Why, we should wonder, had he been entrusted with such authority? Was it because God, the gracious and merciful, the Master of the thirteen qualities of forgiveness and compassion, could not have withheld the life-giving dew and rain all these years? Hence, Elijah is invested with this authority, Elijah, who would not succumb easily: Elijah who took more upon himself than any other man did. Indeed, too much, being "zealous" for the Almighty. Nor does he conceal his zealousness. Twice he attests to it. In 1 Kings, Chapter 19, verse 9, after his success on the Carmel and fleeing from Jezebel, God will ask him: "What are you doing here (at Horeb)?" This certainly is an odd question from the One who had sent him there. Nevertheless, Elijah responds:

I have been very zealous for the Lord . . . for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slain Your Prophets with the sword, and I, only I am left, and they seek my life to take it way (1 Kings XIX: 10).

Why, then, does God ask the identical question again (verse 13), only to receive the same reply (verse 14)? Is not once sufficient? What could God have wanted from this passionate prophet that He did not hear the first time? Whatever He wanted, He did not receive it. Not even the second time, after He had revealed Himself in the still small

Voice. Elijah's zeal, one might think, should have been tempered, as was the Presence. He should have reconsidered his words, especially since God really knew what he was doing in Horeb, knew that He had commanded him there when he had been sheltered beneath that broom tree in the desert. And especially since by then Elijah must have acknowledged his failure on the Carmel, for after that confrontation only seven thousand Israelites had remained faithful to Yahweh. Surely at least that many had been faithful before (1 Kings XIX:18).¹⁶

Besides, what need was there for such an interrogation at all, seeing that for forty days and forty nights he had trudged, fasting, toward Horeb, beneath a scorching sun and freezing stars; and all this in obedience to Him? Like Moses, he had gone without food or drink for that span of time. And, according to the Midrash, the cave into which he had entered was nothing more nor less than the "cleft of the rock" into which Moses had been placed by God himself.¹⁷

How does God react to this repetitive son? He sends him to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha. To have to anoint Hazael, the future ravager of Israel, was punishment indeed. But the fact is that Elijah never fulfilled that mission, nor the one to Jehu.¹⁸ Only Elisha is appointed by Elijah.

To the second part of Elijah's retort: "... the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant," etc., the Midrash supplies an answer:

Is it My Covenant or yours? Are they My altars or yours? Are they My Prophets? What concern is it of yours? ... I will not listen to an attack upon My people.¹⁹

Nor was the concluding declaration accurate. Elijah was not the sole prophet left. Obadiah had kept one hundred others alive. It may be assumed that still others were hiding in other caves. What was true was that Ahab, Jezebel, and their agents sought *his* life.

Why, then, should Elijah have described himself thus? Above all, he was neither a liar nor a dissembler, and therefore truly considered himself God's only remaining authentic prophet. Only he had challenged Ahab and the more deadly Jezebel. Not for him cowering in caves. And if he remained in Zarephath, he had done so at God's command. All of him was devoted to Yahweh.

16. The census taken by King David, in 2 Samuel XXIV:9, numbered the valiant men (the warriors) of Israel alone at 800,000. 7,000 out of such a population!

17. B. *Megillah* 19b.

18. 2 Kings VIII:9.

19. *Midrash Rabba*, *Song of Songs* I:6. This calumny of Israel is also attributed to Isaiah, another zealous prophet, because he said: "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." To which God replies, "You can describe yourself as a man of unclean lips, but what right have you to calumniate My sons." For the same reason, Resh Lakish stuffed the mouth of R. Abbahu with sand because Abbahu described Caesaria as a "city of cursing and blasphemy." "God," Resh Lakish said, "is not pleased with one who defames Israel."

This is confirmed when he casts his prophetic mantle over Elisha. To the latter's request that he be permitted to kiss his father and mother before following him, Elijah retorts: "Go back, for what have I done to you?" (1 Kings XIX:19-20). A curious response for so natural, so filial a plea. But not in Elijah's eyes. To be a Prophet of God demands all of man. No mortal loyalty dare loom between a Prophet and his Maker. Anyone dedicated to speak God's word not only uses a special idiom, but must adopt a different life-style, which is why Elijah never married, never sired children. Recall Moses and his post-Sinaitic separation from his wife. Indeed, this is also the reason why Elijah appears without antecedents. No mortal bond must hamper his vatic duties.

If, then, he is so devoted to Yahweh, why does he refuse to answer Him properly? To understand this stubbornness, let us look at the interlude between the two queries. Within this interlude the wind, earthquake, fire, and the still small Voice had appeared. Unquestionably, Elijah recognized the significance of that muted Voice. He already knew, as he huddled beneath that broom tree in the desert, that — although a "great rain" had finally fallen (1 Kings 18:45) — the scenario which he had written for the Carmel had been but a transient success. Now, in Horeb, this knowledge was being brought home to him by Yahweh Himself.

Hence the repetition of that first question; hence the demand that Elijah acknowledge his folly and, yes, his *huzpah*. Certainly God had the right to expect his confession, except, that, for Elijah, neither the question nor its reiteration changed the ground rules. Israel had deserted God for the *Baal*. Israel had broken the Covenant. Israel should *not* be blessed with rain until the people acknowledged their transgression. Not even God could have it both ways.

Therefore he *had* been justified in staging his drama. Yes, it had failed. Yes, Yahweh's way was the only lasting means of bringing His children back to Him. But that did not gainsay his own intent. He *had* been zealous for God, and he *was* the only genuine prophet left. Whatever his error, it had been born out of this very zealousness. From that truth he would not be moved. Staunchly, therefore, he asserted what he had already asserted; let Yahweh do with him what He would.

Many strange situations emerge from this Carmel episode. Though Elijah is described as a "prophet" of the Lord in 1 Kings XVIII:36, he is called that only once. Yet, other Israelites are so designated. But what is more startling is that the attendants of *Baal* are called prophets, six different times. Even the priests of the *Asherah* are awarded this title. Why should the author of Kings abuse this burdened word, "prophet"? But, of course, it was not abuse, it was satire: a mockery of Jezebel's efforts to introduce her pagan cult, the worship of the Zidonian Melkart, subsumed under *Baal*, a generic name.

Jezebel's fury at the murder of the 450 priests of *Baal* by Elijah

is not only an expression of religious wrath, but of political wrath as well. Elijah's challenge on Carmel gave the lie to all that she had hoped to achieve, i.e., the evolvment of each primitive Israelite with his obsessive Yahweh devotion, into a cosmopolite, akin to the surrounding nations.²⁰

Moreover, Ahab, who had witnessed the confrontation on the Carmel, had done nothing to oppose it. On the contrary, he had cooperated, had gathered not only Israelites to the mountain, but the 450 "prophets" of *Baal* as well. What is also telling is that he did not bring the 400 "prophets" of the *Asherah*. Why not? The text does not say, but, probably, he knew Jezebel would not release them. They ate, after all, at her table.

The third, and most significant point of this episode, is that Ahab continues to obey Elijah, even after the slaying of the "prophets" of *Baal*. He eats and drinks at his command, and departs for Jezreel only when signalled by Elijah. In return, Elijah runs before the royal chariot.²¹ Was it, as some believe, to honor the king? Or was it to encourage Ahab to continue to overthrow the *Baal* cult? Or perhaps to impress upon Israel that not for Ahab had the rain descended, but because it had been ordained through Elijah, Yahweh's deputy? Or was it to ascribe the blessing of rain to both: to king and Prophet? True, Ahab's role could not compare with Elijah's. But the king had participated, — indeed, by just witnessing, he had put his seal of approval upon the confrontation. This double accolade then, of Throne and Prophecy, Elijah must have hoped would eliminate idolatry forever.

Was Elijah too hopeful? Ahab, after all, was an Israelite, a Jew. For all that he was husband to Jezebel, he was still no pagan. His children's names contained the signature of Yahweh: Ahaziah, Joram, Athaliah, Joash. The refusal of Naboth to surrender his father's inheritance, though a grievous disappointment to him, had not been challenged. He may have been sullen, displeased, have refused to eat, but not for a moment did he contemplate seizure. It did not occur to him that he could usurp another Jew's possessions.

True, he did not oppose Jezebel's plan. There is, to be sure, no indication that she shared her plans with him. On the other hand, he accepted the vineyard. The state of his conscience is not revealed then. But with Elijah's denunciation, he caved in completely. There was no doubt in his mind that the verdict pronounced against him would be executed. How could he not accept it when he recognized its justice? Yahweh was not Melkart. His rule did not sanction false witnesses, nor

20. Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah, the wife of Jehoram, King of Judah, would attempt to do the same in Judah after the death of her son (2 Kings XI:1-16).

21. According to Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book VIII, Chap. XIII:6: "And the prophet was under a divine fury and ran along with the king's chariot unto Jezreel." Notice: "along," not "before."

illegal punishment. One could not murder and inherit. Which is why he humbles himself immediately; he lies in sackcloth, indeed, wears it, fasts, walks softly — all this, undoubtedly, to the perplexity, if not downright scorn, of Jezebel. Melkart, after all, gave her no such problems.

Nevertheless, Ahab reports every detail of the Carmel confrontation to Jezebel, including the slaying of the 450 “prophets” of *Baal*. Knowing his wife, he could foresee exactly how she would react, not only against Elijah, but against himself as well. After all, he had co-operated. What choice words she had for Ahab we never hear, the text remaining singularly silent, but for Elijah there is the promise of death. Because of it, Elijah flees beyond the boundary of Israel. But more than his personal peril, it was his sense of failure that depressed him, and he prays for an end to his life.

The appearance of the angel at this point, the nourishment that he provides, and the forty-day trek to Horeb, fueled by just this meal, is but one of a series of supernatural events that attend Elijah: ravens feed him, flour and oil never cease, celestial fire consumes his sacrifice on Carmel. Indeed, we have become so accustomed to this manifest link with Divinity that we cannot help concluding that he is the most coddled of all the prophets of the Tanakh. The final episode, his ascent amid a whirlwind, in a flaming chariot drawn by fiery steeds, seems almost normal for so pampered a child of God.

Undoubtedly, there is a special relationship between God and Elijah. As we have seen, Elijah is excessively zealous for God. And it is because of this fervor that he is endowed with unusual power, a power to which God Himself submits. He waits for Elijah’s word to end the drought. Waits, and waits . . . until His patience runs out. Hence, the death of the child, and the protest of Elijah: “Have You also brought evil upon th widow with whom I live by killing her son?” For he knew: the death of the boy had been arranged. But why his “also”? What other evil had God caused? What, but the drought, engendering hunger, thirst, starvation, death.

Surely a bizarre protest from one who could end it! He whose pity was not sufficient to stop the suffering of thousands, now laments the demise of one lad. Why, we should ask, should this one child’s life be more precious to him than the lives of thousands? Because this passionate prophet who, until then, had always been on the move, never allowing himself a human relationship of any duration, had been tied down in Zarephath for lo, these several years. Each day he had been in contact with this boy, listened to his chatter, no doubt responded to him, until gradually, probably unbeknownst to him, the youngster became part of his life, became endeared to him.

It tells us much that, when he takes the boy from his mother, he carries him to his own room and puts him on his own bed: a symbol

of adoption. Three times he stretches himself on the little corpse, and three times he pleads: "O Lord, my God, I pray You, let this child's soul come back to him." Three times! Twice, he is rebuffed, but the third prayer is answered: the lad is restored to life.

What ensued the first two times? Why was his plea granted only in the third instance? Because between the first and third prayer there had to be some soul-searching on the part of Elijah, and some bargaining. If this child's life was so dear to Elijah who was not even his father, what of the lives of other children to their natural parents? Indeed, what of the sanctity of all life? We can imagine such challenges hurled at him by Divinity.

For the child to be revived, Elijah had to summon the dew, which the Midrash associates with the Resurrection.²² Once the dew appears, he can evoke the rain. Elijah has no choice. He commands the dew. It only remains for him to call forth the rain. But he does not rush to complete his task. He cannot grant this relief just yet. According to B. *Sanhedrin* 113b, he protests with the argument which is the basis for the confrontation on the Carmel: "How could rain bless the land when the people of Israel did not repent of their sins?"

But by now Yahweh is as determined as he. He will break the drought, for the "famine was sore in Samaria." Not only were humans in peril, but there was no food for cattle. Because of this scarcity, Ahab and his steward, Obadiah, set out in search of grass. It is during this quest that Elijah appears to Obadiah and orders him to send Ahab to him. Surely, on the face of it, a simple mission to fulfill. But not for Obadiah, who becomes frantic. How can he report such tidings to Ahab when everyone knows that Elijah disappears so easily, that "the spirit of the Lord" could carry him away. It would be worth Obadiah's life for him to announce Elijah's presence and this evanescent Elijah not to appear.

Elijah, however, assures him that he will not vanish, and Obadiah does his bidding. What is significant about this encounter between Ahab and Elijah is not only that the king comes, but that he does so without a contingent of soldiers to arrest the prophet. Certainly one would expect such a move. After all, Ahab had been scouring his world to lay hands on this one whom he calls a "Troubler of Israel". And, indeed, Ahab does address him thus. But that is the extent of the rebuke. As we have seen, he does all he can to comply with Elijah's instructions, though the latter minces no words in accusing Ahab of disloyalty to Yahweh.

What is, perhaps, more telling, is that Elijah does not at this moment announce the impending relief of rain, though this message was explicit

22. B. *Hagigah* 12b: *V'al she-atid ha'Kadosh Barukh Hu l'ha'ayot bo meitim*. It is also found in the *piyyutim* of Passover, in the Prayer for Dew.

in God's dictate: "Show yourself to Ahab and I will send rain upon the land." That Elijah would have to lift the ban is indisputable. That was part of the payment for the life of the lad. But he would do it in his way. He would teach Israel the lesson that was needed: not only that God was King, but that He had commanded the drought.

Nevertheless, to achieve that, all he had to do was prepare the sacrifice of his bullock in a normal manner, and then invoke the Heavenly fire. The message would have been clear enough. Especially after the failure of hours of pagan excesses: leaping, lancing of flesh, spurting of blood, exhortations to *Baal* — all had proved fruitless. *Baal's* bullock was unconsumed, and Elijah's taunts during these heathen gymnastics hovered in the air.

How dramatic a contrast would the sacrifice of Elijah have been, had he achieved it just with his two sentences:

O Lord, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, for You have turned their heart backward (1 Kings XVIII:36-37).

This simple, poignant, and astonishingly conciliatory plea would also have brought down the Heavenly fire and consumed the bullock of Yahweh. Would those present not have exclaimed: "The Lord He is God. The Lord He is God", as, in fact, they did after his more complicated presentation?

Why, then, did he arrange such a scenario: why repair the altar, and probably extend it, with twelve more stones; arrange the wood and the animal; dig a huge trench in the earth around the altar; and over all pour water, not once, not twice, but three times? Altar, wood, and bullock, were necessary. So, too, his prayer. But the water, the stones?

The thrust of the twelve stones was obvious enough. They dramatized the unity of Israel and Judah, though these were separate nations then. This reunion was vital for Elijah, and for most of the prophets. For the altars that Jereboam had set up in Bethel and Dan were more political symbols than religious ones. With them, Jereboam had weaned Israel from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem and its Temple, the sole acceptable center of worship. Therefore, the twelve stones were both a denial of the sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan, and, paradoxically, also a negation by Elijah of the sanctity of the Temple. For with this altar on Carmel, he, too, denied the centrality of that House. Why, we should ask, did he do this?

Even his prayer is puzzling. "You did turn their hearts backward!" How could such an accusation pass his lips? Was this worship of *Baal* then, God's fault? What happened to free will? And what of Elijah's fierce devotion to Yahweh? None of these had diminished. Nevertheless,

at this moment Elijah knew that he had to testify to his love for his people. Until now there had surely been no evidence of such devotion. On the contrary, we heard only censure and, yes, cruelty, but with this implication of God's involvement, the infidelity of Israel is muted.

On the other hand, was this a strategic ploy: a means of forcing the hand of Divinity, to send down the fire, to overturn the course of nature? By implicating God, even partially, was he not coercing Him to cooperate? "You, O Lord," he is saying, "must bear some part of the responsibility for these, Your erring sons. Therefore, do Your share in bringing them forward, in making them acknowledge Your sovereignty."

True, the prophet had portrayed this drama as the will of God. But where was such a contest commanded? To go to Ahab, because He was about to send rain, does not imply such a program. This confrontation is all Elijah's. And, to be sure, it is promptly after this plea, with its mitigation of Israel's culpability, that the fire descends, consumes the drenched bullock and wood, scorches the stones of the altar, then laps up the water on the earth and in the surrounding trench. That explains the role of the water. The message is unmistakable: not only that the Lord is God, but that the drought is not happenstance. What Elijah achieved with the water was to dramatize the consequence of idolatry: in this case, the lack of rain and the ensuing famine.

The water, that penetrated every detail of this ritual, reflected the normal condition of the land: its animals, trees, mountains, earth, streams. The fire, that swallowed every vestige of moisture and burnt not only the bullock (animals), but the wood (trees), scorched the stones (mountains), and lapped up every drop of water from the soil (earth) and trench (streams), was Divine punishment for Israel's disloyalty. This was the lesson that Elijah was determined to teach before summoning the rain. No wonder the prostration of the people, acknowledging the one God, as though the Israelites could no longer bear to behold this holocaust, which not only defied the laws of nature, but which attested to their guilt. For this moment, at least, those who were present knew that, despite Elijah's placating prayer, God had not turned their hearts backward. The people, and they alone, were responsible.

Alas, however, this attestation of loyalty was hardly a lasting one if but seven thousand remained faithful thereafter to Yahweh (1 Kings XIX:18). Surely that many had not bowed to *Baal* even before the confrontation. Even Ahaziah, Ahab's heir, would continue to worship the *Baal*. He would inquire of *Baal Zebub* when he became ill, though he must have known that his father had paid a heavy price for infidelity. One would think that so ignominious a fate as Ahab's, of dogs licking his blood, would have given his son second thoughts about deserting Yahweh.

Granted that all of Israel did not, indeed, could not, have witnessed

the confrontation; there can be no doubt that the message reached the whole of Israel — but in vain. Prophets had rebuked, comforted, rushed to do God's bidding, resisted it, wept, even rebelled. But they did not force His hand as Elijah did on the Carmel, and they did not exact obedience nor reverse the laws of nature. The Midrash invoked a dire punishment upon Elijah for revealing the secret of compelling the advent of the Messiah.

Moreover, miracles were neither effective nor remembered. For how long after the delivery from Egypt with its plagues, the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, with the Sinaitic Theophany itself, did Israel remain faithful? Despite all this, Elijah clung to his conviction: that to end the drought while the Covenant was still rejected was not only to denigrate, if not destroy, God's pact with Israel, but to have inflicted years of useless suffering. Therefore, he attempted to bring the people of Israel to their senses, to become once more a partner to the Covenant, before lifting the ban. No wonder that he allowed himself the sacrifice on the Carmel, a rite forbidden by his own code.

When, however, despite this elaborate scenario, Israel continued to serve the *Baal*, he could bear it no longer. Not surprisingly, therefore, he longed for death in the desert beneath the broom tree. As far as he could tell, he had failed. One might assume after this despondency, and certainly after Horeb, that a more chastened Elijah would have emerged. But there is no evidence of this. Indeed, he again drew down fire from Heaven, but this time upon men, upon two contingents of soldiers sent to arrest him. As far as we can tell, he would have remained relentless, had not an angel intervened (2 Kings Chap. 1).

Why then, we must ask again, did such a stubborn, contrary, stern, and demanding personality evolve into the benefactor par excellence of the helpless and the needy? How could he have won the confidence of scholars and mystics?

Was it because, having been taken alive from this earth of mortals, he could move in both terrestrial and celestial paths with equal skill? Or was it because he was hailed as the Herald of Messiah, hence the messenger of good tidings to all men?²³

Neither, I suggest. What Israel recognized in Elijah was a beloved of God. More, one whom He spoiled. Never was he castigated as was Jonah, though he maintained the ban against the dew and the rain, knowing that its lifting was Yahweh's will. Only for the child did he call upon the dew, and only after he had taught what he thought was a vital lesson, did he pray for the rain. The Midrash may describe a Draconian disciplining of Elijah, but not the text of Kings. Even at Horeb, when God corrects him, He does not deal severely with him.

What the text does describe is the special love of God for this dif-

23. Malachi III:23.

ficult son. But, then, the zeal of Elijah for God was unique. Moses and Jeremiah had to be commanded to their vatic duties.²⁴ Indeed, for forty years Moses had earlier cut himself off from the world and his people. And both Moses and Jeremiah complained bitterly of their plight as leaders and as prophets.²⁵ Elijah's only complaint arose out of his own sense of failure. His opposition to Yahweh was fueled by his consuming love for Yahweh. It was this love that was acknowledged at the end of his life.

For who but an Elijah was raised heavenward in so awesome a setting? Soaring upward upon a flaming chariot, he disappeared not as a corpse, but in the fullness of flesh and spirit; not taken with a kiss, but as befitted his passionate temperament, raised in a blaze of glory (2 Kings II:11).

Elisha, who was allowed to witness his departure, cried out, himself aglow with prophecy: "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and their horsemen" (2 Kings II:12). Nothing could have been more apt. Chariot and horsemen were the chief defenders of Israel. In Elisha's eyes, Elijah, his Master, was that defender of Israel. For that moment, his role as accuser was completely forgotten.

What was prophetic about this rapturous vision of Elisha? Simply, that this image which he evoked would be engraved upon the hearts and minds of Israel as well. For, as Elisha recognized his master's special bond to Yahweh, a kind of Divine "protexsia", so Israel acknowledged this very role, and, therefore, could, and did, accept him as the ideal protector and intercessor. Such a favorite had to have a unique influence with the Creator of all mankind, and certainly for His firstborn, Israel.

24. Exodus III:13-14 and Jeremiah I:5.

25. Numbers XI:11-15 and Jeremiah XXI:14-18 and XLV:3.

A Viennese Interpretation of Moses: Arnold Schoenberg's Jewish Identity

ALISON ROSE

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG, THE INNOVATIVE Viennese composer whose parting with tonality changed the face of modern music, was born Jewish. He converted to Protestantism in 1897, when he was twenty-three, and the following year he was married in a Protestant service. Although his religious outlook incorporated elements of Protestant teachings, records indicate that, after his move to Berlin, he had no affiliation with the Church. Rather, he turned to Jewish symbols and he affirmed his Jewishness in response to Viennese anti-Semitic proclivities.

Schoenberg is representative of a group of assimilated Jews who embraced (or re-embraced) Jewish tradition in response to the problems of modern times. This phenomenon has created difficulties for historians of assimilation, who deem outward signs to be the indicators of a loss of Jewish identity. In Schoenberg and many other Jews of this period, we find examples of Jews who were assimilated according to external criteria; however, they consciously retained a Jewish identity.

Does the assimilated Jew ever rescind his Judaism? Most people would set conversion as the limit at which one can still be considered a Jew, but some studies indicate that converts from Judaism should still be considered in the realm of Jewish history.¹ In this paper I will show that Arnold Schoenberg not only remained a Jew, but translated Jewish tradition into modern language, thereby creating his own variety of Judaism. His representation of Moses in his works will be analyzed in the context of his plight as a Jew in the modern world, particularly in response to the increasingly tumultuous Viennese political scene.

I will begin with a description of the dilemmas which faced the Viennese composer as a modern, assimilated Jew. The body of the paper will then examine the image of Moses which Schoenberg created in his works on that theme. Through Moses, Schoenberg incorporated Jewish tradition into his art and ideology. Specifically, I will ask: how

1. See, for example, Todd Endelman, "Conversion as a Response to Antisemitism in Modern Jewish History," in *Living with Antisemitism*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover/London, 1987) and the articles in his *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World: Converts and Missionaries in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1988).

ALISON ROSE is currently doing doctoral dissertation research at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

does Schoenberg's Moses differ from the traditional or historical one, and what can we conclude about the composer's Jewish identity on the basis of this comparison? And, further, how was this a response to the racism and rejection with which the Viennese public confronted him?

Schoenberg was born in 1874 in Vienna to parents who had come there from Pressburg (Bratislava). His mother was devout, while his father was considered a freethinker. He had to pursue his musical interests without formal training, because his parents were not well off financially and, when his father died, the family responsibilities and duties increased. He managed to learn music independently and to practice with a group of musically inclined friends. Alexander von Zemlinsky was especially influential in getting Schoenberg's career on a firm footing. His style of self-learning reflected his approach to other aspects of his life, including religion. For him, learning meant being awakened to one's own knowledge and understanding. In teaching, he was also influenced by his own experiences of learning. He steered away from set patterns or rules and, instead, emphasized self-discovery.

As early as 1899, Schoenberg's compositions inspired controversy and opposition. As time went on and his style became increasingly dissonant, public hostility heightened and, as a result, his family suffered economic hardship. His self-acclaimed mentor, Gustav Mahler, was a loyal friend and supporter and helped Schoenberg through difficult times.

From an early age, Schoenberg demonstrated an interest in the Bible and its relevance to modern questions. At the age of 16, he had defended the Bible against the attack of his cousin.

You go on to say that you have only disputed the amount of nonsense in the Bible; now I must oppose you, as an unbeliever myself, by saying that nowhere in the Bible is there any nonsense. For in it all the most difficult questions concerning morals, Law-making, Industry and Medical Science are resolved in the most simple ways, often treated from a contemporary point of view; in general the Bible really gives us the foundation of all our state institutions (except the telephone and the railway).²

His interest in the Bible and religion also penetrated his music and, in a letter to the poet Richard Dehmel, in 1912, he expressed his wish to write a large scale religious work. The war years intervened and temporarily prevented him from realizing his plans; however, his experiences in the service during the war turned him decisively away from secularism. Consequently, the plans for *Die Jakobsleiter* preoccupied him during this time.

Schoenberg came to identify the artistic role with Divine inspiration, as is evident in his identification with "the Chosen One," the main char-

2. H.H. Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, trans. Humphrey Searley (New York: Schirmer Books, 1977), p. 26.

acter of *Die Jakobsleiter*. In his writings on artistic inspiration, he mixes the categories of religion and psychology.

This is also the place to speak of the miraculous contributions of the subconscious. I am convinced that in the works of the great masters many miracles can be discovered, the extreme profundity and prophetic foresight of which seem super human.³

The working of the subconscious and of a “miracle” occupied his conception of the artistic process. “Normal men possess a conviction, great men are possessed by a faith . . . But the work of the greatest artist is produced, above all, by his instincts.”⁴

Religion was also a source of strength in facing the emotional difficulties of artistic rejection and escalating racial hostility. The crucial importance of spirituality in Schoenberg’s thought is exhibited by the centrality of religious themes in his work. When he was confronted with prejudice during the early 1920s, he developed a higher level of moral reasoning and a more dialectical and complex world view. In 1922, he was turned away from a summer resort near Salzburg, because of anti-Semitic agitation. Shortly after this incident, he refused Kandinsky’s invitation to join the *Bauhaus*, a cultural center in Weimar, because he had learned from Alma Mahler that some of the members were anti-Semites. In a letter to Kandinsky, dated 20 April 1923, Schoenberg declared:

I am not a German, not a European, indeed perhaps scarcely even a human being (*ein Mensch*) (at least, the Europeans would prefer the worst of their race to me), but I am a Jew. I am content that it should be so. Today I no longer wish to be an exception; I have no objection at all to being lumped together with the rest.⁵

After the First World War, Schoenberg turned his attention to Moses. His method of composition of *Moses und Aron* as described in a letter to his student and disciple, Alban Berg, suggests that the writing possessed him and that the opera seemed to him to have a life of its own.

I want to try very hard to get the opera finished before going back to Berlin. It isn’t going as fast as I hoped at the beginning when I reckoned with a *daily* average of twenty bars . . . Main reason: the libretto and the choruses . . . Then I’m slowed up still more by writing out a complete score from the start, which of course takes a lot of time. But still, the advantage is that I’ll have finished the whole job when I’ve composed the last note. There’s only one thing I’m afraid of; that by then I’ll have forgotten everything I’ve written. For even now, I can scarcely recognize the parts of it I composed last year. And if it weren’t for a kind of un-

3. Arnold Schoenberg, “My Evolution” [1949], in Karl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the New Music*, 1967, p. 81.

4. Arnold Schoenberg, “Franz Liszt’s Work and Being” [1911], in Dahlhaus, p. 82.

5. To Kandinsky, 20/4/22, in Erwin Stein ed., *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters*, trans. Eithone Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), p. 88.

conscious memory that always automatically brings me back to the right track of ideas, both musically and with the words, I wouldn't know how the whole thing should come to hang together organically at all ...⁶

In 1926, Schoenberg moved to Berlin to teach a class in composition at the Prussian Academy of Arts. During this period his working conditions were better than they had been previously, and his creative output increased.⁷ However, anti-Semitism intervened. On March 1, 1933, at a meeting which Schoenberg attended, the government announced its intention of removing all Jewish elements from the academy. He left the meeting abruptly and resigned his post.

He then left Berlin with his family and moved to Paris, where he announced his official return to the Jewish faith. The following year he accepted a post teaching in Boston. For health reasons, the Schoenberg family moved to Los Angeles in 1934. Like many other refugees, he never really became acclimated to his new surroundings.

During this time Schoenberg formulated a positive Jewish identity in a fight against Nazism. He spoke of plans to give up music and devote himself entirely to the cause of Jewish rescue work and Zionism. Although his practical work in this area was short-lived (perhaps because he feared the consequences for friends and family still in Europe, or perhaps because he feared that music and politics were a dangerous combination and, in the end, he opted for music) he did not abandon the conflicts of the European Jewish experience. He lived to see the founding of the State of Israel, and was elected president of the Israel Academy of Music. He expressed his gratitude by suggesting the Divine mission of Israeli musicians.

Those who issue from such an institution must be truly priests of art, approaching God's altar. For just as God chose Israel to be the people whose task it is to maintain the pure, true, Mosaic monotheism despite all persecution, so too it is the task of Israeli musicians to set the world an example of the old kind that can make our souls function again as they must if mankind is to evolve any higher.⁸

Religious Works

Schoenberg's first religious work, *Die Jakobsleiter*, was conceived in 1912, was written during 1917-1922, and remained unfinished at his death. The work is about the path to God and the prayer of modern man. The main character, the Chosen One, seeks faith in a world in which the future must remain hidden. This theme spoke to Schoen-

6. Willi Reich, *Schoenberg, a Critical Biography*, trans. Leo Black (New York: Longman, 1971), p. 179.

7. Oliver Neighbour, "Schoenberg," in *The New Grove: Second Viennese School* (London, 1980), p. 13.

8. Reich, p. 232.

berg's professional development, which was directed by his own artistic necessity and his need to accept his lack of power over his own destiny.⁹

In 1922, Schoenberg wrote a play, *Der Biblische Weg*.¹⁰ This prose drama contained many of the ideas which he later developed in the opera, *Moses und Aron*. The theme of the play is whether or not Zionist nationalism, founded on religion, can adapt itself to the demands of the modern way of life. The principal character, Max Aruns, combines the attributes of Moses and Aaron. He aspires to leadership of the chosen people; he wants to gather his people and build a theocratic state which would fulfill the Biblical prophecy. He and the spiritual leaders of the Bible face identical problems in convincing the people, both adversaries and friends, in order to realize their vision.

Aruns plans to bring his people to Africa, where they will have time to mature spiritually, meditate, and purify their souls. Only in a later generation will they be sufficiently prepared to return to their historic home. Aruns runs into problems when it comes to communicating this idea to his people and to the nations. Schoenberg described the Jews' return to the Land of Israel in "peaceful conquest, though the use of force, including an all-destructive 'rocket'," might be necessary to reclaim the land and to force the nations to let their Jews emigrate.

At the climax of the first act, Aruns, at a festival gathering, delivers a speech to his people which summarizes Schoenberg's beliefs on the mission of the Jews. In it he tells the people to stand up and be obstinate like the people of the Bible, "but today we are no longer obstinate against God as were our forefathers, but for Him, who has chosen us for His people."¹¹ Aruns proclaims that the Jews do not need miracles, because years of persecution have made them strong; the last barrier to the Messianic age was that not all Jews could yet conceive the notion of God as the highest Being on whom everything depends, "whose laws we feel and acknowledge but are denied the right to question." He tries to persuade the people to strengthen their faith in a God Whom they cannot know. Thus, Aruns sees the people's distance from God as the ultimate obstacle to the Messianic age.

He fails in his wish to unite all Jews to form God's state on Earth, because of human imperfections. In the end he is unable to set his Divine mission, remaining faithful to God's work, above earthly matters. In the words of Asseino, who symbolizes traditional Jewry:

9. Dika Newlin, "Self-Revelation and the Law: Arnold Schoenberg in his Religious Works," *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre*, ed. Israel Adler (Jerusalem, 1968): 209.

10. A. Schoenberg, *The Biblical Way*, trans. Wesley Blomster, 18 July 1927, Schoenberg Institute Collection.

11. Peter Gradenwitz, "Gustav Mahler and Arnold Schoenberg," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 5 (1960): 273.

Max Aruns, you want to be Moses and Aaron in one person. Moses to whom God gave the idea but denied the gift of speech; and Aaron who could not grasp the idea but could formulate it and move the masses. Max Aruns, you who could interpret the word of God in so modern a manner, did you not understand why God did not unite both gifts in one person?

Rather than trusting God to lead the Jews along the Biblical road, Aruns tries to fight for independence with modern means. He maintains that Moses and Aaron were two necessary components of the *statesman*. Aruns asserts that they can remain separate, exist mutually side-by-side, and that the political aspirations and activities of Aaron need not pollute the pure Idea of Moses.

Ultimately, Aruns learns that Asseino was right. Disgruntled insurgents attack and kill him. A new leader, Young Guido, takes over and announces the new goal: to perfect the spirit and rise above earthly matter. Clearly, this work addresses the political situation in Europe, and the difficulties of combining spiritual and political leadership. The dilemma of how spiritual values are to be realized remains unresolved.

In the opera, *Moses und Aron*, Schoenberg returned once again to Biblical characters to deliver his message and to express his dilemmas as a Jew and an artist in the modern world. Moses and Aaron represent two sides of leadership. While Moses is able to understand the ideas which are to be the basis of the monotheistic order, he lacks the quality to inspire his people to follow this idea which can not be seen. Aaron, on the other hand, has the power to move the people but fails to comprehend the idea. The Biblical sources for the work were: Moses at the burning bush, the meeting of Moses and Aaron in the wasteland, the miracles performed by Aaron, and the worship of the Golden Calf (Exodus 2,3,32). Schoenberg interprets and develops the story in an entirely personal way. The overall shift in emphasis away from physical liberation toward spiritual liberation suggests the importance which Schoenberg placed on inner harmony and faith as the means to freedom. He put in the foreground the notions of the inconceivable God, "I AM THAT I AM" [Exodus 3:14], of the chosen people, and of the leader of the people.

Schoenberg's interpretation and transformation of the traditional story, particularly his characterization of Moses, suggest the role of tradition in his thought, and his own identification with the figure of Moses. Through deviations from the traditional text, Schoenberg created a modern version which spoke to his dilemmas as a modern Jew and as a cultural innovator striving for acceptance.

In the first scene, *The Calling of Moses*, Moses is transformed into a mysterious figure, not troubled by trivial human concerns. In contrast to the traditional Moses story, Schoenberg mentions no family and no physical needs. In the traditional story of the Bible, there is a sense

that God is arranging everything and that Moses is a human vehicle to transmit His message. Schoenberg's Moses appears stronger in his resolve to carry out his task. He does not ask God for Aaron's help, "Oh LORD send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send," [Exodus 4:13] but, rather, God offers it. Also, in Schoenberg's version, there is no conflict between God and Moses, because the Divine, for Schoenberg, is not tangible — it is an idea. The non-tangible element of the Divine is also evident in the chanting quality of the speaking choir in combination with the singing voices. Musically, Schoenberg represents the Divine with two choirs, a speaking, or rather chanting one and a singing one. This representation suggests two aspects of the Divine, the Idea and the Image.¹²

In the next scene, Schoenberg introduces Aaron. Simultaneously, Moses speaks and Aaron sings throughout the scene, setting the precedent for the lack of communication between them. The conflict between Moses and Aaron is more central in Schoenberg's version than in his source, and it is reflected also in his representation of the people, who are depicted by a chorus. However, a few of the more extreme individuals stand out from the crowd. For example, there is a young girl who saw Moses at the burning bush. She wants to accept Moses' God on naive faith. Similarly, a young man has seen Aaron going to meet his brother because God commanded him to do so. On the other extreme, there is a Priest who is the skeptic. He is a reactionary who is involved with the old religion and is distrustful of the new. The crowd does not simply function as one people, as in the Bible.

In the final scene of the first act, Moses and Aaron tell the people about the invisible God. They are not able to comprehend such a notion, and the Priest, their adversary, speaks out and rouses them to reject Moses' God. Moses responds, "My strength is exhausted and my thought becomes powerless in Aaron's word." Aaron says, "Silence, the word is mine and the deed." At this point he tears the rod from Moses' hand. This symbolic action is the juncture from which Aaron, in a desperate attempt to regain the confidence of the people, takes control and strays from the purity of Moses' Idea which he cannot grasp. Aaron now performs three miracles for the people to convince them that the new God is powerful. For each miracle the Priest creates an objection and re-incites the people.

In Schoenberg's rendition, Aaron performs the miracles to convince the people to worship a God Whom they cannot see. Schoenberg creates the struggle within the chorus in order to portray a spiritual crisis. In Exodus there is initially no resistance to the monotheistic God:

12. This interpretation of the two choirs is generally accepted. However, there is a lack of consensus as to which choir represents each aspect of the Divine. Michael Cherlin, "Schoenberg's Representation of the Divine in *Moses und Aron*," *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 9 (1986).

And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had remembered the Children of Israel, and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped [Exodus 4:29-30].

In the opera, dissension in the ranks replaces the traditional harmony. This transformation suggests that Schoenberg's struggle, and that of his generation, takes place internally, instead of with Pharaoh. The freedom that was sought was the freedom from outdated forms of worship, rather than a physical liberation from an external oppressor. The conservative forces in the mob thus become the chief enemy to the mission of Moses.

Schoenberg opens the second act with Aaron and the Seventy Elders before the Mountain of Revelation. In Exodus, this scene focuses on the action on the mountain between Moses and God [Exodus 25-31]. Schoenberg shifts our attention, instead, to what is happening below. When the Elders conclude that Moses is dead, because of his long absence, a belief that is compounded by their lack of faith, Aaron, persuaded by the Seventy Elders, returns their gods to his people. We are kept in the dark about what is transpiring between God and Moses. Rather, the relevant lessons are provided by the uncomprehending people.

The climax of the opera comes in the third scene of Act II, entitled "The Golden Calf and the Altar," and consists of a blood-thirsty orgy of drunkenness and dancing before the Golden Calf. The source is Exodus 32, but, once again, Schoenberg freely expands and interprets the text to communicate his message. The culmination involves a celebration of the flesh, in which the wild mob offers up human sacrifices and the sensual is accentuated to an extreme. The physical aspect of the Revelation and man's communication with God, which, in the earlier scenes, was irrelevant, now becomes an obstacle to spiritual comprehension of the Divine Idea.

When Moses returns from the Mountain of Revelation, he says, "Begone, you image of powerlessness; to enclose the boundless in an image finite,"¹³ and the calf disappears. His reaction is expressed verbally rather than physically. This contrasts with the Biblical account in which Moses grinds up the golden idol and makes the people consume it. Once again, Schoenberg de-emphasizes the material qualities in the traditional Moses.

The final scene of Act II consists of a dialogue between the brothers, in which Aaron tries to justify his action to the angry Moses, while Moses' anger escalates through the course of the exchange. At the end of the altercation Moses smashes the tables of law; thus it is words,

13. A. Schoenberg, *Moses und Aron*, pp. 495-496.

something on the level of the Idea, which brings Moses to his crisis, as opposed to the sight of the Golden Calf, which provoked the traditional Moses.

A pillar of fire appears and turns into a cloud, leading Aaron and the people off the stage. Moses seems to be defeated and says, "Thus all is madness that I believed in before, and can and must not be given voice. O word, thou word that I lack!"

These are the final words which Schoenberg set to music. He was unable to write the score to Act III, in which Moses is victorious and Aaron dies, because, in reality, he could not reconcile the quandary by expressing the inexpressible, unity with God.

Thus, the problems of leadership remain unresolved. How is one successfully to lead the people, a people who naturally tend to the activities of an idol-worshipping mob, to believe in something intangible? Is it possible successfully to pursue politics based on spiritual values?

These are questions which remained unanswered and could not be resolved by Schoenberg. What he did accomplish in this major grand testament, was to use the Bible to speak relevant lessons to his generation. The conflicts of the Torah are internalized and spiritualized. The mob takes on the role which the naive masses of uncomprehending Jews played in his world in Vienna, especially those who believed their future in Vienna to be secure. The mob opted for the tangible, yet fleeting, pleasures of Aaron over the sublime, yet intangible, ones that God offered to them through Moses. Similarly, the Jews in Vienna chose to believe in the efficacy of assimilation and a self-abnegation until, in many cases, it was too late.

Although the opera was unfinished, and the problem of the leadership of the people which had been central to *Der Biblische Weg* and *Moses und Aron* was left unanswered, we learn that we must have faith in trying times. We must not be weak and give in to our foes. We must remain obstinate in the face of danger by facing the reality of our situation, however difficult that may be.

I.B. Singer and His Predecessors

LIPPMAN BODOFF

I

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER HAS ACHIEVED what certainly may be regarded as one of the highest honors to which any writer can aspire, the Nobel Prize in literature. One would think that such an award would either represent or create a consensus about the nature of his achievement. In fact, this has not been the case. Jewish opinion continues to be divided over whether Singer has been uniquely mischaracterizing *shtetl* life, with his tales of sex, demons, and debasement, in order to pander to current popular literary fads and tastes (a charge somewhat like that made by many about Philip Roth), or whether he is a Yiddish writer who is very much like the fathers of Yiddish literature — Mendele, Peretz and Sholom Aleichem — or whether, perhaps, he falls into some third category. A close reading of his works and those of his predecessors will suggest that the truth is more complex. Singer's work provides both continuity and contrast with the past.

Mendele, the father of modern Yiddish literature, was primarily a *Maskil* (a representative of the Jewish Enlightenment) who wrote works of imaginative satire, designed to hold up a mirror to the Jews of the *shtetl* and their self-destructive qualities. Jews are quarrelsome, disunited, hair-splitting, divorced from action, from sexuality, and from nature, perpetually allowing themselves to be kicked and trod upon, without respect for, or interest in, modern education, even as they cling to their traditional superstitions of demons and magic rituals regarding what causes evil in the world, and, most particularly, the evils suffered by the Jewish people. They are full of talk, daydreams, glorious pride in their martyrs, fantasies and hopes of magical relief from their troubles and redemption by a Messiah. They are powerless, led by leaders who bow and scrape, like beggars, before others, and — what is worse — are uninterested in power, the importance of self-help, of raising themselves up by education and new, productive economic activity. Characteristically, the *shtetl* male is not a model of achievement but a *luftmensch*, the powerless and incompetent husband, constantly ridiculed by a wife who is buried in economic and sexual frustration.

In one of his representative works, *The Mare*, Mendele tells the picaresque tale of the narrator, a *luftmensch* Jew, and a mare, as they discuss the Jewish condition that each represents — each an aspect of the Jewish

LIPPMAN BODOFF is the new Assistant Editor of JUDAISM. In 1986 he retired as Assistant General Consul of AT&T and, since that time, he has been pursuing graduate studies in Jewish literature and history.

psyche. The crucial message of the story is simply that Jews can't merely demand humane treatment, they can't achieve success by dreams, and they can't wish away anti-Semitism. At the end, a drunken Ashmedai, the Devil and King of the Demons in Jewish tradition, and who, in the story, represents the evil power that seems eternally to control Jewish fate and is blamed for all the evil that befalls Israel, is used to mock Jewish intellectual poverty. "Where should I let you off?" he asks the airborne *luft-mensch*. "Tell me where you live. I found you up in the air, after all." The Jew cannot answer, but dumbly looks "toward the east." And, then, Mendele has Ashmedai instruct the narrator on how to lead his people, through the Devil's "Ten Commandments": 1. Put yourself before the community. 2. Feed people rituals, piety, so they can't think about how really to solve their problems. 3. Pretend to be compassionate. 4. Make alliance with the strong, e.g., the tax collector. 5. Make continuing religious demands on the people. 6. Lull people with fairytales. 7. Don't respond to complaints; join the people in complaining. 8. Belittle your opponents. 9. Backbite your opponents. 10. Use "home" remedies; encourage the people in their superstitions.

The narrator resists, and is hurled to earth by Ashmedai for his defiance. He awakes from his dream in his room, his mother by his side. He had failed his university exams in history and literature, and his mother had brought him home where he had been in a coma. Forget these "stories," she advises, "just get married. It's the way of the world. It's customary and traditional for us Jews." Nothing has been accomplished, and nothing will be accomplished in the *shtetl*, says Mendele.

Indeed, even when a Jew is smart enough to see the need to get out of the *shtetl* and actually go "to the East," to Palestine, as occurs in Mendele's *The Travels and Adventures of Benjamin the Third*, he has no idea of where he is, where he is going, nor how to get there. In a highly amusing exchange with his friend, Senderel, who agrees to join him in the trip, Benjamin asks where they will get money for food and clothing for their trip and Senderel answers that they'll beg: "What do all other Jews do? . . . It's an ancient Jewish custom: merely a free loan —!" This unfinished book is a series of one mishap after another, all because the hero and his friend are incompetent simpletons. You can take the Jew out of the *shtetl* but you can't take the *shtetl* out of the Jew. The solution is not more dreams, even Zionist dreams, but, first must come the reeducation and self-improvement of the Jewish people in the ways of the modern world.

In *Benjamin*, too, we find devils and demons being blamed as part of *shtetl* superstition for all the bad things that happen to Jews, and even, ironically, when something good is happening, like Benjamin's trip, that does not conform with *shtetl* ways. Thus:

Most of the people, however — and the women were of the number — waxed eloquent: Benjamin must be in cahoots with *Them* . . . with the Powers of Darkness. He must be hand in hand with the Evil One.

And when they share their plans with skeptical Jews on the way, the reaction is that Benjamin must be more than an ordinary mortal: "Who knows, perhaps Benjamin is a reincarnation of someone else." If it's not the Devil, it's another soul that must be to blame.

Thus, Mendele remains the liberal, modernist *Maskil*. He depicts *shtetl* Jews as superstitiously blaming the Devil for Jewish troubles. The Devil is also used by Mendele as an active character in his stories, both to embody the real devil of Czarist Russia and the forces of reaction, as well as to mock and satirize the ways in which Jews are their own worst enemies. His agenda is social, educational, political, religious, psychological. Get with it, he is saying, leave the past, leave the *shtetl* outlook, customs, rituals, and culture, because they chain you to a past from which there can be no redemption.

II

With Sholom Aleichem we come to a much different point of view. He considered Mendele his cultural father and, in the beginning, he, too, was a *Maskil* in his critical approach to *shtetl* life. However, Sholom Aleichem eventually turned away from such ridicule, when he saw that the Gentile world would continue to reject and persecute Jews no matter how they might speak, dress, or think, and that Jews had to create their own new cultural identity out of their own past. An important transitional story in this development is *The Haunted Tailor*, which recounts the inter-family and inter-*shtetl* turmoil that results from a flawed society and family structure of ignorance, superstition, sexual frustration, and disunity. The poor hero, a tailor sent by his shrewish life to another town to buy a goat, buys one that mysteriously gives milk only in the seller's house but not when the tailor brings it home. In the end, the resultant buffeting which the tailor suffers causes him to break down physically and mentally and, indeed, as the story ends, to turn virtually into a goat himself, with the two towns at the brink of bloodshed in defending the "honor" of their respective citizens. Here, the elements of ridicule are still strong.

We also see in *The Haunted Tailor* the beginning of the use of Satan as tempter: "All at once . . . out of no place, Satan the tempter whispered into his ear: Listen to me, Shimon-Eli, you fool, why are you standing here, singing on an empty stomach," and persuades him to cut short his prayers and go to his relative's inn for food and drink. But, after this story, Sholom Aleichem treated the *shtetl* with sympathy, tenderness, and affection for its warm community feeling, the humor despite adversity, the loyalty to Jewish traditions, the perseverance in the face of adversity. His reaction to the new anti-Semitism of the 1880s was to embrace his people with love.

What we have here is the transition to a new, romanticized view of the *shtetl* as a place of innocent, childlike, nostalgic folk life, a secularized,

non-halakhic, idyllic view of a past that the author knew was unreal, but which he created for the purpose of giving Jews a cultural identity. With such an agenda, Satan ceases to have the function that he played in Mendele as a vehicle of bitter satire regarding Jewish inadequacies and illusions. Instead, Satan becomes a humorous aspect of the many folkways and beliefs that keep people going, like the folk beliefs of every other culture. The innocent rituals and symbols help give people a shared past, an identity, a mode of easy communication, and a practical way of getting through the inevitable difficulties of life that all people encounter.

Sholom Aleichem's most popular creation was Tevya the Milkman, a figure larger than life, designed to entertain the Jewish people and give them some pride in an idealized, though difficult, past that stands for Jewish values divorced from halakhah and messianism, a culture that was Jewish even while it was secularized. Sholom Aleichem's literary technique is to treat sympathetically the cultural shell of traditional small town Jewish life, while cutting out its theological inner workings. One could cite Scripture, as Tevya so artfully did, without necessarily living it in all its detailed rigor. This shell was necessary because it was the only way that Sholom Aleichem could transmit his subtle, secularized message. In contrast with Peretz, as we shall see, Sholom Aleichem identified himself with traditional *shtetl* life, even as he subtly distanced himself from it by his humor and his stance as narrator, observing as an outsider. If Germans and other peoples could have a national identity based on their idealized folk pasts, he said, why not the Jewish people?

When, however, Sholom Aleichem tried to move beyond the *shtetl*, as he did in his novel, *In the Storm*, he created uninteresting, cardboard figures representing the new trends among Jewish youth, Zionists, Socialists, and Bundists, those who looked to find a way out of the past and into a new Jewish future of some kind, and those who believed that the only solution was to change society and abandon class, cultural and even national differences and boundaries.

III

Peretz was a liberal, secular humanist who did not identify himself with the *shtetl*, but looked at it from the outside. His people are not from a folk past but a mythic one. There is neither bitter ridicule, nor even a tender, sympathetic, nostalgic, backward look at the foibles of a simple people. Rather, using a much sketchier portrayal of personalities and places than did Sholom Aleichem, Peretz created heroic fables of a people who are moral heroes. Moreover, their heroism is not because of their devotion to halakhah, or because of other-worldly saintliness. Rather, it is because they embody, in their *shtetl* garb, modern moral values that go beyond Jewish tradition and halakhah and are often even in conflict with it. Even when they succumb to temptation, the Devil, now portrayed as

the tempter, the evil inclination, must struggle mightily, and when they fall it is not a matter of moral disgrace.

For Peretz, the Jewish heroes were Biblical personalities, men of great universal moral strength, with something to teach the modern world. Our men and our women, as Peretz argued in *What Our Literature Needs* and as he portrayed them in his stories, must become live heroes and not dead saints. We must get out of the *shtetl* and deal with the experiences and cultures of other Jews and other peoples throughout the world.

Peretz, like Sholom Aleichem, used the Hasidic world as his literary prop, as the frame and the packaging for his broad, worldly, modern moral messages. Those messages were almost always upbeat, stressing what Jews could accomplish when faced with moral challenges. Thus, his works are serious, intellectual, almost abstract in their spare use of color and detail. For Peretz, a good Jew was a liberal, modern thinking European.

There are four stories that I think dramatically illustrate Peretz's viewpoint. In the classic *If Not Higher*, the skeptical Litvak seeks to ascertain the basis for the adulation of the Hasidic rebbe of Nemirov by his disciples. On the night of *Selihot*, when the penitential prayers are said before Rosh Hashanah, he follows the rebbe into a forest, where he sees him, disguised as a peasant, chopping wood and delivering it to a widow's cottage, which he cheers and warms with a good fire. To the claim of the rebbe's disciples that their master ascends to heaven during *Selihot*, the no-longer skeptical Litvak answers: "If not higher." The virtue of the rebbe is not halakhic or even traditional saintliness; it is *this-worldly* ethics. The rebbe is not a man of God but a moral hero of the kind that each of us can become. There is a level of goodness that is beyond heaven. The ability to reach heaven may, indeed, be limited to the saintly rebbe, but the ability to reach "even higher" is one that we each can attain.

In *Devotion Without End*, Miriam, a lovely young bride, disguises herself as her husband in order to cheat the Angel of Death, in the form of Achnai, the snake, which is destined to kill her husband, Chanania, on the eighth day of their marriage. She successfully fools the Angel of Death and, when her soul reaches heaven, she is mistaken for Chanania. There she is asked, in accordance with Jewish tradition: "Did you study the Torah each day?" to which she replies: "Lord of the Universe, have you ever directed the daughters of Israel to study your Torah?" At this point, tumult breaks out in the heavenly court; the heavenly decree has been thwarted because Chanania has been saved by Miriam's sacrifice. Miriam's soul is allowed to return to her body since it was not she who was supposed to die, whereupon she is restored to life, and she and Chanania live happily ever after.

Peretz here glorifies the love of a Jewish bride which reaches self-sacrifice, even though her actions are contrary to halakhah and the Divine

decree, and are performed by someone who is not even instructed in Torah — although, Peretz may be implying, she should have been! Hers is the moral grandeur of the hero in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*.

In *A Pinch of Snuff*, Satan is allowed to try to bring down the rabbi of Helm. The rabbi resists bribery and seduction, but Satan finally fools him into a technical violation of the laws of *T'hum Shabbat*, the boundary beyond which a person may not travel on Shabbat. First, Satan moves the tree that the rabbi had marked as the boundary. Then, while the rabbi innocently reaches for his snuff box that had been blown away from his reach by Satan, the latter replaces the tree in its original place. "The rabbi looked up . . . the sun had set. The stars were out. For a pinch of snuff he had violated the Sabbath." Here, it is Satan himself who is parodied. All that work, and so little to show for it. The rabbi's entrapment may be viewed as a sin in the eyes of Heaven, and as an accomplishment by Satan (the youthful devil, who achieved this success, "waited for the ovation to let up"), but for Peretz the hero is the rabbi, and the moral victory in this encounter is his, despite the technical violation of halakhah.

And, finally, there is the classic *Bontsha the Silent*, the paradigm of the simple man, the archetypal Jew, whose life contained little good but, also, little evil, whose only desire, passion if you will, even when the Heavenly court offers him anything he desires as a reward for his simple life, is a hot roll with fresh butter every morning for breakfast!

Peretz here makes two points. First, man is not only not evil and, in fact, capable of moral courage, but even his desires are modest and, withal, rarely fulfilled. Second, the passive acceptance of injustice in this world is not a virtue, and it cannot be remedied even in a promised world to come. There must be justice here, or there is no justice. For Peretz, ultimately, it is unacceptable for the Jewish people to remain the crippled, spiritualized chosen people of their post-Biblical tradition. The suffering of Jewish martyrs, such as that described in his story, *Three Gifts*, is beautiful, but useless. Jews must strive to become the normal, healthy, natural human beings of their classical past, and join the rest of humanity in trying to achieve a better world through a return to the physical courage and moral heroism of their Biblical ancestors, the men and women, young and old, who made myth into a reality.

IV

Among Singer's other major predecessors we need mention — briefly because of space limitations — only S. Anski, Itzik Manger, "Der Nister," and two of Singer's earlier contemporaries, his brother, I.J. Singer, and Chaim Grade. Anski, like Sholom Aleichem, sought to locate and create a new cultural identity for a secularist, non-Zionist, non-traditionalist Jewish people. He based it on folk materials, which he literally went out and searched for from town to town in an ethnographic expedition, as

one would collect other artifacts. His exotic play, *The Dybbuk*, is based on folk memories going back to Chmelnicki's pogrom in 1648, but, in his romantic, expressionist drama, the wills of the two young lovers overcome both society and religion. There is little moral criticism or challenge in his work, but, rather, the intrigue of the strange, a folkish obsession with the boundary between the living and the dead, and the plot tension associated with society's attempt to thwart romantic love — all suffused with folk traditions, symbols, and practices.

Itzik Manger resembles Sholom Aleichem in elevating the common Jew, the tailor, of the *shtetl*, as his folk hero, and seeking, through his imaginative reworking of Biblical tales, to create a Jewish folklore, which — he emphasized in his essay, *Folklore and Literature* — is essential if the Jewish people are to have a living literature. His work goes beyond Sholom Aleichem in his satiric and irreverent treatment of the Jewish "establishment," including the religious and political heroes of the past and the present, but he always does so with imagination and good humor.

"Der Nister" embraced the new symbolism, primitivism, and abstractionism of the early 20th century, which eliminates the identifying characteristics of a particular culture, blurring time and space, mixing symbols and metaphors, and the cultures and religions which they represent, in jarring incongruities, in favor of emphasizing the common experiences and needs of mankind. It stresses clever technique and calls attention to the artist rather than to the subject, in an elitist rebellion against realism. Yet, its obscurity does not prevent "Der Nister," as in his great story, *Under a Fence: A Review*, from making strong points about the transition from a narrow, obsolete religious past to a secularized, modern, materialist present, in which the hero-scholar leaves his abandoned and rejected academic tower for a circus, at the direction of a Mephistophelian dustman who claims his soul under the guise of being his new protector. In the process, the scholar debases himself through his love for a circus beauty, and causes serious injury to his daughter who joins the circus with him. But "Der Nister"'s work does not deal with Jewish culture at the human level, the daily moral problems that people face, and how they meet them. It is much more analytical, historical, and even determinist, in its vision and sweep, and, ultimately, more successful in saving the soul of the artist than the soul of his people or of mankind. Indeed, anticipating his later *The Family Mashber*, this story portrays mankind at a cul-de-sac, stuck in an endless war between the equally morally objectionable polarities of life — art and materialism versus religion and tradition, Hellenism against Hebraism — leaving the sensitive man, or Jew, lying drunk under a fence with no place to go. Ironically, "Der Nister" was killed by the new socialist society that was heralded as mankind's new savior.

In addition to the *shtetl* literature of satire and idealization, fantasy, and expressionist abstractionism already mentioned, we must refer to the brief flowering of the post-*Maskilic* Yiddish novel of social realism in the

four decades beginning in the 1930s, exemplified by “Der Nister” in *The Family Mashber* (a style forced on him by Communist cultural ideology), I.J. Singer, in such works as *Yoshe Kalb* and *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, and Chaim Grade, in such works as *The Yeshiva*, *The Agunah*, and the novellas in *Rabbis and Wives*. All wrote in a *verismo* style, showing the darker underside — the conflicts within, and among, Jews of every class and religious outlook — of the oppressive, tightly-knit Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, and depicting the shattering impact of economic, social and intellectual change on Jewish religion, family structure, and community life.

V

In I.B. Singer’s works, we shall find a literature that draws on the literary attitudes and materials of all of his predecessors, albeit with an emphasis on the bizarre and the melodramatic rather than on folk quaintness or social and psychological realism. His work is overwhelmingly shaped by his moral sensibility and his pessimism about man’s capacity to cope with the moral challenges of life, depicted in the daily struggles of individual Jews, grappling with their humanity and its weaknesses, in every environment and era. In this regard, despite his close identification with the ghetto life of the past and the similarity of the subject matter of much of his work with that of his *Maskilic* predecessors, which is so integral to the very language of his work, Singer emerges as a writer of universal modern significance. For him, the problem is not the need to change the superstitious, Eastern European *shtetl* Jew into a modern, Westernized, secular citizen of each country, but the universal condition of man, at every moment vulnerable to his or her passions and lusts — in Freudian terms, the dominance of man’s ego and id.

Singer can best be understood as a teller of moral tales. In some, epitomized by such works as *The Slave*, *Short Friday*, *Shosha*, and *The Spinoza of Market Street*, he portrays man as he can be at his noblest — loyal, persevering, loving, patient, sensitive, devout, meeting the challenges of life with physical and moral heroism. More characteristically, however, his tales involve the successful temptation of a vulnerable human being by some embodied Satanic representative. The latter is often the narrator, to emphasize evil’s reality and almost limitless power. Even the morality of good people is questioned, as in the story *Alone*, where the demonic woman who has failed to seduce the hero taunts him by questioning if he would have spoken of God’s omniscience and resisted her had she been beautiful. Whether it is pride, lust, envy, greed, or vanity, all of the moral weaknesses of modern man plague men and women alike in such stories as *The Mirror*, where the narcissistic, beautiful, and lovely wife, Zirel, succumbs to become Ashmodeus’ whore, and *Zeidlus the Pope*, where a Yeshiva boy dies at the Devil’s hand and learns, too late, that there is a God,

having succumbed through vanity to the Devil's suggestion that his learning will be fully appreciated only if he abandons the Jewish people and succeeds in becoming the Pope. Like Peretz, Singer believes that Jewish literature must deal with the moral challenges of man's life, but he differs in his view of man's moral strength and the power of evil, reflecting the difference in the reality of 1900 as compared to the middle of this century. Thus, for Peretz, there is always hope, and his stories are optimistic models of what man at his moral best can achieve. For Singer, having lived long enough to see not only the mega-evil of Communism and Nazism, but the daily evil growing worse every day on the streets of New York, life is the story of man's moral failures. Evil has achieved such power in the world that man's free will has almost — but not quite — been nullified. Singer's pessimism is extreme. S.Y. Agnon, who lived through much of the same terrible time frame as Singer, portrayed his Jewish characters more subtly, more understandingly, less cynically and less despairing of their vulnerabilities and motivations. Perhaps witnessing, as a Zionist, the growth of the *Yishuv* (the Jewish settlement in Palestine) provided Agnon with a balance of hope that Singer lacked.

It is useful to compare Agnon's story *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight* with Singer's *The Unseen*. In Agnon, the hero, Menashe Hayyim, by mutual agreement with his presumably barren wife, goes off to travel for a time and collect money so that they can get back on their feet after a series of financial mishaps. Because he is unable to avoid squandering the money that he collects, Menashe Hayyim stays away long beyond the time when he is expected to return, and, when he is, erroneously, reported dead, his wife remarries and has children. When he does return, he chooses not to reveal himself, preferring to live in a cemetery — thereby, symbolically, legitimizing his widow's remarriage and ensuring her happy new family life. In Singer's story, *The Unseen*, a similar idea is played out, not as a portrayal of moral courage and heroism that rises, to paraphrase Peretz, "even higher" than the law, but, rather, as the debasement of two Jews even on the holiest night of the year, the eve of Yom Kippur. A divorced wife, feeling compassion for her now poor and ailing former husband — and lonely while her present husband is away, as he generally is — finally shares with her first husband the love that they were unable to find while they were married. For Singer, man is corrupted and debased by his desires for himself, while, for Agnon, man is elevated and ennobled by his compassion for others. In each story there is an adulterous relationship, but in one it is noble and results from selflessness, while in the other it is base and results from selfishness. Each of these masters sees man with different motivations.

Another Singer work that may be compared to Agnon's story is his novel, *Enemies, A Love Story*. There, four Holocaust survivors, a man and the three women to whom he becomes simultaneously married (only in part, unwittingly), cling to each other out of passions born from love, grat-

itude and tradition, as survivors cling to the wreckage of a ship that has gone down. As a result, they bring new emotional havoc to their lives, because no one of them is able fully to rise above passion to the ethical imperatives of duty and compassion.

Singer's use of the Devil and demons in his stories symbolizes the difference between his outlook and those of his predecessors like Mendele and Sholom Aleichem. They use the Devil and demons sociologically, as a symbol of the superstitious beliefs of the *shtetl*. Singer, as he has said, uses them for their symbolic power and because he believes in their reality. In a word, they represent for him the tremendous, almost dualistic, gnostic power in the world, as bitterly told in the story, *The Last Demon*, in which the demon/narrator bemoans his fate as the last of his group. With the destruction of the Jews and the universal debasement of man, there is no more work for him. Yet, he concludes, as long as one Jewish book, or even a letter, remains, he will always have a worthy and powerful adversary.

Many critics contend that, since the innocent and pure optimism of such early works as *The Slave*, Singer has for a long time ceased to write with the hope, much less about the reality, of a humanity that is capable of rising to its moral challenges. While much of his work supports such a view, his most recent novel, *King of the Fields*, is dramatic evidence to the contrary. There, Singer portrays men and women who are able to achieve a semblance of humane sensibility even in a primitive, pagan, society of constant violence and savagery. This novel also portrays a well-developed idea in Singer's earlier work, in such novels as *Satan in Goray*—the crucial difference between societies that are based on man-made "religions," of nature and power, the secular "isms" of modern man seeking meaning and purpose in a world without God, in which man or a Messiah of man's imagination and creation is at the center, and religion based on the Jewish concept of a Divine moral authority in the universe Who is apart from, and above, nature, and Who demands allegiance and obedience from the strongest of mankind.

There are other works of Singer to be noted that are perhaps more sophisticated and restrained in the hope they hold out for a "kinder, gentler" humanity. In *The Seance*, two elderly people, she an eccentric medium, he a former philosopher who now believes in nothing, not even in her, whom he recognizes as a fake, both adrift and alone in the world, each searching desperately for the warmth if not the love of companionship, provide each other with a reason to live. As she affirms at the end of the story: "There is no death. We live forever, we love forever." And, in the haunting story, *The Cafeteria*, Singer describes the intermittent friendship between the narrator, Singer himself, and the lonely, brave, romantic Esther, who cannot find honesty or love in the world. Indeed, she insists that she has seen Hitler himself in the cafeteria, among us—perhaps even, in some way, a part of us. Yet, when the narrator learns

of her suicide, he laments: "She could have got a better bargain even in this world."

The ultimate strength of Singer lies in his ability to portray man's lust for life, together with the artist's vision of life as a continuing moral challenge which is, all too often, a daunting and overwhelming one. His target is not — as it is for Mendele — Jewish superstition, and his goal, unlike Sholom Aleichem's and Anski's, is not molding folk artifacts into a cultural identity. His realistic technique is far from the self-conscious abstractions of "Der Nister" (before *The Family Mashber*) and the spare, intellectual, Hasidic stories of moral challenge and victory of Peretz. His goal, consistently realized, is to portray modern man, largely through East European Jewish life, in his unequal struggle to overcome the evil that — for Singer, in such works as *The Family Moscat*, *The Last Demon*, and *Satan in Goray* — man himself has set loose in the world by his abandonment of God and his worship of Messianic and Utopian ideologies — secular or religious — that seek to eliminate the need and opportunity for individual moral choice. In almost always portraying his characters in personal rather than political or social tensions, Singer reveals his animus toward secular humanism and all the ideological "isms" that it has spawned, which simultaneously suppress human individuality and enshrine man — with all his selfish passions — as his own God.

There is a seeming inconsistency between Singer's recognition of the overwhelming power of evil, and his continuing respect for Judaism, its moral and ritual precepts, in such works as *The Penitent* and *Shosha*. But, for Singer, religion — and, particularly, Judaism — is the only "ism" which provides any hope that man may overcome his passions, precisely because it is not created solely out of man's own debasement. As Yasha, the hero in *The Magician of Lublin*, finally recognizes: "A religion was like an army — to operate it required discipline. An abstract faith inevitably led to sin." But religion must struggle with doubt and lust, and man's free will to make moral decisions, and the outcome is not guaranteed. As he remarks in the "Author's Note" at the end of *The Penitent*:

The powers that assail us are often cleverer than every one of our possible defenses; it is a battle that lasts from the cradle to the grave. All our devices are temporary, and valid only for one specific attack, not for the entire moral war. . . . Resistance and humility, faith and doubt, despair and hope, can dwell in our spirit simultaneously. Actually, a total solution would void the greatest gift that God has bestowed on mankind — free choice.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that, for Singer, the Holocaust is not a new watershed but merely a new context for the eternal challenge of each person's moral responsibility — and, for some, the opportunity for new temptations and new rationalizations. The challenge facing the hero, a multi-wived Holocaust survivor, in *Enemies*, *A Love Story*, is not much different than that facing the *shtetl* Jews of *Satan in Goray* three centuries earlier. In this regard, Singer is like Manger, for whom the denizens of

Heaven are subject to the same weaknesses and foibles as the residents of Earth; time and place make no difference in man's behavior. We will always be morally tested, says Singer, and the Divine commandments of religion are thus literally eternal as man's only reliable guide in making moral choices.

For Singer, therefore, like for Cynthia Ozick, the Jewish artist has a moral mission, as a secular prophet whose calling is to remain the adversary of man's weaknesses and passions even until the Last Demon has been abolished. Yet, one is tempted to ask: What lies in store for Jewish fiction literature in the Diaspora after Singer? Is it possible that Jewish writers rooted in Jewish tradition will pass from the scene before the Last Demon? In his important essay, "The Problems of Yiddish Prose in America",¹ Singer has already indicated that writers in Yiddish cannot survive in a culture that does not speak the Yiddish language; a living language must be spoken. It is, indeed, because of this that Singer uses East European Jewry as his metaphor for modern society — it is their culture that he and Yiddish "know" best. Irving Howe has expressed the equally troublesome view that, with the successful acculturation of the American Jew, there can be no more significant Jewish American literature, because its essence has been Jewish alienation which, in this country, is rapidly disappearing.² But, if writers of the past are soon to pass, and writers of the present are increasingly without a constituency for whom they have a message, what, if anything, is next? To this, Singer surely provides an important answer: there will always be a Jewish literature as long as there is a Jewish people who will be morally challenged in their lives, as all of humanity is destined always to be challenged. The specific issues facing Jews will be different, and the contexts too, of course — be it women's role in Judaism, the nature of Jewish identity and loyalty in the Diaspora, questions of bio-ethics, or issues of class and politics. The packaging is endless and limitless, but a moral agenda will always remain. Asking Singer what remains to comprise the "stuff" of a Diaspora Jewish literature is like asking Englishmen or Italians what remains to comprise the "stuff" of their respective national literatures. The answer surely includes the moral struggles of each people in its particular environment.

Moreover, the issues need not be only the personal, moral challenges faced by each individual in his daily life. There has been, and continues to be, a good deal of important Jewish literature about other subjects. Yet, most of this creative writing goes largely unstudied, unread, and unrecognized, as part of the Jewish literary tradition. Based on a survey that I conducted a few years ago, it appears, sadly, that the curricula of virtually all of our Jewish studies programs in universities, seminaries, and day schools, contain but a limited number of the high quality, and often

1. This essay was published in 1943, and was first translated and appeared in English in *Proof texts*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (January 1989): 5-12.

2. "On Jewish American Writing," *Tel Aviv Review*, Vol. 2, Fall 1989/Winter 1990: 343-8.

classic, works of Jewish fiction by such writers as Asch, Babel, Broch, "Der Nister," Disraeli(!), Feuchtwanger, Grade, Heym, Ja botinsky(!), P. Levi, Joseph Roth, Rubens, Scliar, Wasserman, and Zweig, and American writers like Blankfort, Burnshaw, A. Cohen, Lewisohn, Morgenstern, Neugeboren, Nissenson, Steinberg, Wouk, Yeziarska, and Zeldis, all of which deal with a myriad of Jewish problems and experiences that might interest and enrich Jewish students, who too often must struggle with fiction that does not touch their identity and concerns as Jews.³

I believe that we need to take three important steps to help develop further this universal Jewish literature. First, we need methodological work that will begin to articulate the bases and criteria for a modern, creative development and renewal of a Jewish literary history that already exists, and has existed, often without being aware of itself beyond the limited horizons of each society in which it grew.

Second, Jewish literary scholars, critics and publishers, wherever they are found, need periodically to come together and maintain the kind of information network that will rapidly inform them about the works of Jewish writers (and perhaps, also, works by non-Jewish writers on Jewish history and life, whether a history work by a Paul Johnson or novels like *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot and the *Joseph* trilogy by Thomas Mann) from around the world. Summaries and critical evaluations of these works should be exchanged as they become available, and summaries and evaluations commissioned where they are not reasonably forthcoming in the press and literary establishments of each country.

Third, we must find ways to translate these works into the principal languages with which Jews are familiar, to permit the most effective dissemination of such works among Jewish people everywhere.

By expanding the horizons of Jewish literature in this way, we will simultaneously encourage writers all over the world to think in terms of a single Jewish people, its history, its destiny, its challenges, and its achievements.

In these ways we can give Isaac Bashevis Singer a literary continuity as he passes on the tradition of challenging the moral fibre of our people, as have so many of his illustrious predecessors throughout world history.

3. For Jewish drama and dramatists, a good place to start is Ellen Schiff's insightful book, *From Stereotype to Metaphor* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982).

The Biblical Perception of the Origin of Evil

REUVEN HAMMER

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN REMARKED — AND rightly so — that evil is a conundrum for Judaism, an unsolvable puzzle which ethical monotheism can never unravel. As MacLeish put it in his play, *J.B.*:

If God is God He is not good
If God is good He is not God.¹

Dualistic systems or pagan systems had fewer problems. They posited that the gods themselves can be evil, or that there can be evil demons or Powers of Good and Powers of Evil which battle each other and have done so since the beginning of time.² But a religion in which only One God exists and in which that One God is posited as righteous, just, and merciful, has an obvious problem. There can be no evil agents which oppose His will.³ The severity of the problem is emphasized by Isaiah who, in combatting notions of dualism, has no choice but to say of God:

He creates light and darkness
Makes peace and creates evil (45:7)

which the rabbis, for liturgical use, wisely changed to “creates everything.”⁴ The creation of a special blessing for evil tidings⁵ is an acknowl-

1. Archibald MacLeish, *J.B.* (Boston, 1956), p. 11, ff.

2. W. Jaeger, *Paideia* (New York, 1945), p. 143. In its early stages, Greek religion ascribes evil to hate. Later, however, evil is seen as the result of man's own folly. In Hesiod, the Prometheus myth also ascribes evil to man because of his stealing fire from the gods (*Ibid.*, p. 66). Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago, 1972), pp. 38-39, writes that “paganism ascribed to the gods what it knew to be evil acts . . .” See also p. 292.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

4. *B. Berakhot* 11b. Since there is a rule in *J. Berakhot* 1:5 (11:a) that a Biblical verse may not be turned into a blessing, some have suggested that that was the reason for the change. That is unlikely, however, since had that been the reason it would have been possible to find a different phrase closer to the original. Furthermore, as with so many general rules, there were exceptions. Therefore, in view of the fact that there is a definite tendency among the rabbis to emphasize God's quality of mercy rather than His quality of justice, that is more likely to be the motivation for the change. Another example would be that when using the verses “The Lord, the Lord . . .” (*Exodus* 34:67), the rabbis eliminate the final words “yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations.” Since they considered that the quality of mercy was greater than that of justice (*Mekhilta* I,55,103 ed. Lauterbach), Isaiah's formula would have presented difficulties. See M. Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York, 1952), pp. 315-322.

5. *Mishnah Berakhot* 9:2.

REUVEN HAMMER is Associate professor of Rabbinics, Jewish Theological Seminary of America — Jerusalem.

edgement that whatever there is, stems from God, so that if there is suffering, even in that we must acknowledge Him.⁶

For purposes of this paper, let us put aside the problem of natural disaster, including illness,⁷ and concentrate on the aspect of evil which somehow disturbs us the most, human evil, and see what, if anything, the Bible has to say about it. The puzzle of human evil as presented in the Bible is, of necessity, sharpened by the fact that in clearing away all but the vestiges of mythology in its account of creation, the Bible also eliminated the notions of evil which pagans had proposed, and went so far as to emphasize that God's creation is wholly good. The striking use of the phrase "and God saw that it was good," repeated several times, climaxes in the phrase, "and behold it was very good." If it was very good, how does it happen that it is now so very bad? Whatever the answer to that question, it is obvious that the Bible wants to assert that evil is not inherent within God's creation. This problem of how a good God could even permit the existence of evil was dealt with extensively in medieval Kabbalistic works.⁸

The Bible, on the other hand, deals with the problem only obliquely. The entire opening section of Genesis seems designed to convey the message that man is the source of evil as well as a great disappointment to God, his creator. It does not reveal how man, God's creation, could have been made with such an inherent flaw.⁹ In a certain sense, the story of evil begins with the story of Adam and Eve, albeit this is really a preliminary step and not evil itself.¹⁰ Christian doctrine and

6. *Mishnah Berakhot* 9:5; *Sifre* Deuteronomy, piskah 32 (p. 60, Yale Judaica Series [New Haven, 1986]).

7. Natural evil, rather than human evil, is really the subject of the Book of Job. The question posed is, "Why does the righteous man suffer? Why do natural calamities, illness, etc., befall him and his loved ones?" The book makes clear that such suffering must not be seen as a sign of wickedness. See Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job and Man* (Chicago, 1965). See also this author's article, "Two Approaches to the Problem of Suffering," JUDAISM, Summer 1986.

8. The classic summary of the subject is found in Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1946), pp. 235-239. Scholem outlines various theories, such as that when the wrath of God is untempered by mercy, evil results; or that evil is the "refuse of the hidden life's organic process" (p. 238) expressed in such metaphors as "the 'shell' of the nut," a "symbol of the Merkabah taken over by the Zohar"; or "because God wanted man to be free, he ordained the real existence of evil, so that he might prove his moral strength in overcoming it" (p. 239).

9. See Kaufmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 293.

10. See Berel Lang, "The History of Evil and the Future of the Holocaust," unpublished paper presented at the Conference on the Holocaust of the Holocaust Educational Foundation, Northwestern University, November 1989. Lang holds that "the knowledge of good and evil comes to Adam and Eve at a moment; neither they nor their descendants have anything to learn about that . . ." Although I disagree with that reading, the excellent paper was the impetus for this article. Although Kaufmann, p. 294, also ascribes the origin of evil to Adam and Eve, he acknowledges that there was a progression from that event: "Man did not thereupon become absolutely evil, but having tasted evil, his sinful impulses raged ever more fiercely."

interpretation, too well known to require elaboration, has made of this story the doctrine of Original Sin which afflicts mankind; it is its central problem and can be overcome only through God's special grace and sacrifice. Human action cannot atone for what Adam did. "In Adam's sin we sinned all," has not been a Jewish doctrine.¹¹ Precisely because it has never seen the problem in that light, Judaism has solved the problem of sin and atonement in other ways. The Day of Atonement and the concept of *teshuvah* (repentance) enable man to achieve God's forgiveness and there is an end to the matter. As we shall see further along, it is not the overcoming of original sin which stands at the heart of Judaism, but the overcoming of man's tendency toward evil which requires our best efforts. Christianity's central problem is: how does man achieve atonement and salvation in view of his inherent sinfulness? Judaism's central problem is: how does man prevent his inherent tendency to evil from ruling over him?

Do sin and evil actually play a role in the story of Adam and Eve? There is no clear answer to this question in the text itself. The word sin does not appear in the story, and that seems hardly accidental. Sin, it seems to me, implies deliberate action with knowledge of what one is doing. In that sense, can Adam and Eve, who have no knowledge of right and wrong, no experience of the world, who are, in the best sense of the word, the original "innocents," sin? Are any of the actions of a young child "sinful" even when they violate parental commands and are wrong? When Judaism determined later that only upon puberty is a child responsible for him/herself, is it not indicating that only when maturity, knowledge, and experience are present can there be sin? Both good and evil require the knowledge which innocents do not have. Furthermore, even if disobedience to God can be considered "sinful," is it really "evil?" Does not true evil involve harm to others? I may sin against God in desecrating the Sabbath, but is that action evil? This seems to be the distinction made in the famous midrash concerning the punishments inflicted upon the generation of the flood and the generation of the tower of Babel. That of the generation of the tower was much lighter because, although they rebelled against God, they loved one another, while the people of the flood were filled with violence toward one another.¹² It is in that sense that I believe the story of Adam and Eve to be a preliminary story leading to evil and real sin, rather than the origin of evil itself.

As has already been pointed out, the word "sin" does not appear in the Garden of Eden story. But what about the word "evil?" The

11. See however, Kaufmann, pp. 293-294, who posits two different approaches in the Book of Genesis to the significance of Adam's "fall," one of which is very close to the Christian doctrine. In any case, the development of the idea and the interpretation of the story in Rabbinic thought was certainly otherwise.

12. *Beresheet Rabbah* 38 (p. 355 in Theodor-Albeck edition, Vol. 1).

Hebrew word, *ra*, translated variously as wrong, bad or evil, appears in the phrase “the tree of knowledge of good and *ra*,” and has been a source of contention among commentators ever since. Many modern ones are firmly convinced that the phrase “good and evil” means “everything.” As Sarna has written in his recent commentary to Genesis:

“Good and bad” (are) undifferentiated parts of a totality, a merism meaning “everything” . . . (after eating the fruit) their intellectual horizons are immeasurably expanded.¹³

If this is so, then even the concept of evil is not implicit in the story. At most, one can say that we have here a paradigm of innocence and innocence lost. One may even ask: did God intend for them ever to lose their innocence? What father is ever prepared for this in his children? Yet, is it not possible that He did intend to give them that knowledge, but only later when they were ready for it, not on the very first day of their existence? In any case, this is certainly no sin of insurmountable proportions, and one hesitates to designate what they did as being evil.

Later Judaism saw this as the first step in estrangement from God, as cited in the midrash which indicated that God’s Presence removed itself from the world, step by step, as man progressed in his “sinful” actions:

The Shekhinah was essentially below (on earth). Since Adam sinned, the Shekhinah removed itself to the first firmament. Cain sinned — it removed itself to the second. . . .¹⁴

If we are seeking real sin and true evil in the Bible, we must wait until the story of Cain and Abel, where it appears in its full fury. When Cain’s sacrifice is rejected and Abel’s is accepted, Cain’s resentment is seen by God as creating the climate of sin which can result in evil if not controlled, a notion tragically borne out by subsequent events. Thus, God speaks to Cain:

Surely, if you do right
There is uplift.
But if you do not do right
Sin crouches at the door;
Its urge is toward you,
Yet you can be its master (Genesis 4:7).

It is here, for the first time in the Bible, that we find the term sin. It is defined as temptation to evil which man can overcome. The words

13. Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis* (Philadelphia, 1989), p. 19. Kaufmann, p. 293, takes the position that “. . . the tree is conceived . . . not as the source of knowledge in general, but of the knowledge of, and the desire for, evil.” E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, New York, 1964), p. 26, takes the phrase to mean “good and bad,” rather than “good and evil,” in the sense of “being in full possession of mental and physical powers.”

14. *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:7, *Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:6. For a discussion of this concept, see this author’s “The God of Suffering,” *Conservative Judaism*, Fall-Winter, 1976-77.

of God have an optimistic tone. You can overcome it, as if to say, "I know that there is such a thing as sin, temptation to evil, but it need not go beyond the stage of thinking or planning." Unfortunately, God discovers soon that although man can overcome temptation, he will not always do so.

Sin is seen as an almost independent force with which man must contend. That it is not really independent, but is a part of man, is made clear after the flood when, coming to terms with the imperfect nature of man, God says: "... the devisings (or the inclination) of man's mind are evil from his youth ..." (Genesis 8:21), a phrase which led to the rabbinic concept of the "evil inclination."¹⁵ If the perfection of the world was dented by the loss of innocence, it is shattered completely by the murder of Abel, a murder resulting from sin-temptation. The exact cause is left undescribed, thus: "Cain said to his brother Abel ..." (Genesis 4:8), but we never learn what he said. The Septuagint and Targum supply the phrase "Come, let us go into the field,"¹⁶ but the midrash is much more imaginative and gives several possibilities which supply Cain's motivation. For example:

He said to him, "Let us divide the world, and since I am the eldest, I will take a double portion."¹⁷

The implication of the Torah's silence is that the motivations for evil are endless and perhaps unknowable.

The horror of what has occurred is emphasized by the use for the first time of the word *arur*, "cursed," in connection with man. The serpent is cursed (Gen. 3:14), but Adam is not cursed, nor is Eve. The ground is cursed because of them (4:17), but the blessing which God bestowed upon them in Gen. 1:28 is not cancelled. In the case of Cain a severe curse is invoked: "Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground ..." (4:11).

The first time that evil appears in the Bible, then, it is in its quint-essential form: the slaying of man by his brother. Whatever happens after that cannot change the nature of evil. It can multiply it; it can add to cruelty, but the ultimate evil is present in that one act for us to ponder for all time. The horror of this murder-fratricide (and, in the end, all murder is fratricide) is well mirrored in the unforgettable expression on Adam's face in Blake's remarkable painting. The evil within Cain is carried on in mankind.

Man, then, corrupts himself by violence to the point where God regrets having ever created him, and seeks to remedy the situation: "I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with

15. See S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York, 1936), pp. 242-263 for a discussion of this rabbinic concept.

16. On the ancient versions, see John Skinner, *ICC Genesis* (New York), p. 107, n. 8.

17. *Midrash HaGadol* to the verse; *Bereshit Rabbah* 22, Vol. 1, p. 213.

lawlessness because of them" (Gen. 6:13). The remedy, strangely enough, is not the destruction of the genus whom He created and the creation of a new man, but singling out one family which has not been corrupted and may, therefore, found a better mankind. When about to begin again, God announces the source of man's evil, the first time that this is spelled out. It is the inclination of man's heart which is evil, *ra*, from his very youth. That something which crouches, waiting to trap man, about which God warned Cain, is now defined as innate in man — innate and evil. As the midrash later comments, how shameful and evil it must be when its very Creator called it evil!¹⁸ The question, of course, is: why was man created thus? Could God not have done otherwise? The Bible does not touch this issue, although the midrash refers to it, not answering the question but using it as an excuse for man's sin: "... had I not created in him the evil inclination, he would never have rebelled against Me!"¹⁹ Paradoxically, this realization on the part of God is used as the reason for Him not to do again what He did in the flood. If man has an inclination to evil, unless there is to be total annihilation, floods and destructions will not help. What, if anything, will help? Judaism's answer seems to be: laws, commandments. If man is bound by the acceptance of certain external laws upon himself, he will be able to rule over that temptation. Since, inherently, he is not free from evil, only education, i.e., an external way of changing his character, may succeed. In a sense, all of later Judaism, with its halakhic system of self-discipline and constraints, is based upon this insight and this comment.

The Torah, then, tells us, in its oblique and even symbolic way, that evil, the evil that men do to one another, results not from evil inherent in the universe or from some Divine force of evil, but is an integral part of man's nature. Man is subject to temptation to sin, and the evil within him is ready to respond to it. Only imposed discipline can combat it.

There is no problem of Divine forgiveness. The problem is of man learning to overcome himself. It is original evil and not original sin which is the problem.

Afterword

Our century has felt the potency of human evil in a way never experienced before by mankind. The *Shoah*, the attempt by one people totally to annihilate another, carried out with methodical effect, which

18. *Bereshit Rabbah* 34, Vol. 1, p. 320.

19. *Bereshit Rabbah* 27, Vol. 1, p. 259. See also *Midrash HaGadol* to the verse, which indicates in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi that the inclination to evil is one of three things which God regrets having created. The other two are nations which were enemies of Israel.

succeeded in such a large measure, the planned, not the accidental, killing of six million people, is an unprecedented event. Millions are killed in wars. Millions of Russians were killed in the Second World War, for example, but slaughter in war is basically an offshoot of the conflict and not the purpose of the war. In the case of the *Shoah*, the killing, in and of itself, was the intended result. But if the size and scope was unheard of and frightening even to contemplate, in and of itself, we should not lose sight of the fact that it was not essentially different from the murder of Abel by his brother Cain but a horrible extension and expansion of it. The rabbis were insistent upon the horror in the death of one man when they made the statement that "if one destroys a single human being, it is as if he has destroyed an entire world," a lesson which they derive from a verse connected to Cain and Abel.²⁰ If the decision of Nazi Germany to annihilate the Jews is inexplicable in terms of the usual utilitarian reasons for any deed, even an evil one, and seems a case of causeless or senseless hatred, so is the killing by Cain. The reason for it is never stated because no reason will suffice.

One of the tragic consequences of the Holocaust is the tendency to let the terrible numbers distract from the horror of individual killing. People say, why put this particular person on trial? All he did was to kill five people. In our inability to grasp the horror, let us not forget that the basic crime is still the killing of a person, even one. Of course, the Holocaust was also genocide, which has now been defined as an additional crime, the attempt on the life of every person belonging to a specific group. Each such murder and each such attempt is the quintessence of all evil. Multiplied by such figures it seems to change its nature, but the essence of evil remains what the Bible described. The Holocaust was nascent within the first murder.

If we did not comprehend before how man could be so evil, we surely cannot understand it now. What, then, must be our response? Mourning is obviously called for, but the deeper response of all mankind, not only of Jews, must be to seek ways to counteract the evil in man and its transformation into the evil policies of nations. We must combat the inflation of evil with the inflation of good. We must seek to understand the history of good as we try to understand the history of evil. We must discover what keeps man from evil, what possessed those who did not participate in the evil actions of their neighbors and countrymen, and seek to educate and train ourselves and all others in those ways. That is the difficult task which challenges all of us. If the source of evil is within man, it is to man's nature that we must

20. *B. Sanhedrin* 4:5.

turn, and seek to find the way toward change and control. Will we succeed? Dan Pagis gave an answer in his poem "Autobiography":²¹

I died with the first blow and was buried
among the rocks of the field
The raven taught my parents
what to do with me.

If my family is famous,
not a little of the credit goes to me.
My brother invented murder,
my parents invented grief,
I invented silence.

Afterward the well-known events took place.
Our inventions were perfected. One thing led to another,
orders were given. There were those who murdered in their own way,
grieved in their own way.

I won't mention names
out of a consideration for the reader,
since at first the details horrify
though finally they're a bore:

You can die once, twice, even seven times,
but you can't die a thousand times.
I can.
My underground cells reach everywhere.

When Cain began to multiply on the face of the earth,
I began to multiply in the belly of the earth,
and my strength has long been greater than his.
His legions desert him and go over to me,
and even this is only half a revenge.

Let us hope that he was correct.

21. *Variable Directions*.

Hymns of the Isles

GABRIEL A. SIVAN

DESPITE LEGENDS TO THE CONTRARY, Jewish settlement in medieval England postdated the Norman Conquest in 1066. For the most part, those Jews who ventured across the English Channel to establish communities in London, and some two dozen other towns, were culturally indistinguishable from the Jews of northern France. Their business documents were written in Hebrew, but they spoke Old French (perhaps also acquiring some of the Anglo-Saxon vernacular) and often gave themselves Norman-French names. Medieval English Jewry was subject to harsh limitations on its economic activity, however, and — with rare exceptions — never achieved the kind of halakhic and literary brilliance which the Franco-Rhenish communities of “Ashkenaz” managed to attain.¹

According to modern historians, the total Jewish population of England at the best of times, in the early 13th century, could not have exceeded 10,000 and may well have been far less. As a result of systematic repression, impoverishment, and voluntary departure for more hospitable lands, it had probably dwindled to about 2,500 when Edward I had no further use for his Jewish “chattels” and expelled them from his realm in 1290.² By way of comparison, one might add that there were then forty times that number of Jews living in France alone.

The main purpose of this article is to shed light on certain “Hymns of the Isles,” the product of medieval Anglo-Jewish experience and creativity, which form a religious, cultural, and historical link between the England of seven or eight centuries ago and English-speaking Jews of today. Whether written in England itself or elsewhere, these liturgical poems (*piyyutim*) and elegies (*kinot*) bear witness to one tragic sequence of events, yet they also express a characteristic trust in God, and faith in the ultimate redemption of Israel.

1. There are complete surveys of the medieval English background in Joseph Jacobs, *The Jews of Angevin England* (London, 1893), Cecil Roth's *History of the Jews in England* (Oxford, 1941), and other standard works. See also Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx, *A History of the Jewish People* (Philadelphia, 1947), pp. 384-391, and *Encyclopedia Judaica* [hereinafter *EJ*], Vol. 6, cols. 747-752. See also note 25.

2. See V.D. Lipman, *The Jews of Medieval Norwich* (London, 1967), pp. 36-38; *EJ*, Vol. 13, cols. 875-8.

GABRIEL A. SIVAN is a writer, editor and broadcaster. He was recently the Deputy Editor of the new *Encyclopedia of Judaism* (1989).

Background: The Crusades and Martyrology

Until the period of the First Crusade (1096-99), a few years before the death of Rashi, Jewish life in northwestern Europe had been relatively tranquil. Thereafter, it was shattered by recurrent massacres, persecutions, and expulsions, which drove the surviving Jews eastward, into Germany, Bohemia, and Poland. These vicissitudes, involving "ritual murder" accusations, clerical and crusading fanaticism, or simply greed for Jewish-owned property, gave rise to Jewish protest in the shape of commemorative hymns, dirges, and martyrological works. At least two of the *piyyutim* were already associated with the High Holy Days, but now acquired a contemporary meaning as well; others were directly inspired by the new calamities.

U-Netanneh Tokef Kedushat ha-Yom, the first of the *piyyutim*, an awesome and elaborate portrayal of *Yom ha-Din*, the Day of Judgment, when the fate of all mankind is decreed on high ("The great *shofar* is sounded, the still small voice is heard, the angels are dismayed . . ."), forms one of the dramatic high points of the cantor's repetition of *Musaf* on the High Holy Days, Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur. This *piyyut* owes its survival to the fact that it was adopted by Jews observing the Italian and Franco-Rhenish liturgical rites. Some experts believe that it dates from the Byzantine period, and its appearance in a Cairo Genizah manuscript suggests that other (Sephardi-Eastern) communities were also familiar with the text at an early stage.³ From about the 11th century, *U-Netanneh Tokef* gained particular significance in Ashkenazi folklore, where it was associated with Amnon of Mayence (or Mainz), a legendary German Jewish martyr, and Kalonymus ben Meshullam Kalonymus, the *paytan* (poet) of Mainz who traditionally composed the hymn. Quoting Ephraim ben Jacob of Bonn as his source, an eminent halakhist and codifier — R. Isaac ben Moses (Or Zaru'a) of Vienna — further popularized the harrowing Amnon tale in the 13th century, thereby heightening this *piyyut*'s martyrological associations and its appeal to Ashkenazi Jews who had experienced all the horrors of the most recent Crusades.⁴

3. For details, see Eric Werner, *Sacred Bridge* (New York, 1959), pp. 252-5, on the Jewish apocalyptic (*U-Netanneh Tokef*) motif's likely influence on the Byzantine *Hymn of Romanus* and portions of the Latin *Dies Irae*. Cf. Max Arzt, *Justice and Mercy: Commentary on the Liturgy of the New Year and the Day of Atonement* (New York, 1963), pp. 167-8. With regard to the antiquity of this *piyyut*, see A.M. Habermann's ("Amnon of Mainz") entry in the *EJ*, Vol. 2, col. 861, and Shlomo Tal's note in *Ha-Siddur be-Hishtalsheuto* (Jerusalem, 1985), p. 81.

4. On the "Amnon of Mainz" legend and the question of the authorship of *U-Netanneh Tokef*, see Israel Davidson, *Ozar ha-Shirah ve-ha-Piyyut*, Vol. 2 (1929), pp. 199-200, and Vol. 4 (1933), p. 369, s.v. "Efrayim mi-Bona." There are inconsistencies among three entries in the *EJ*: Vols. 2, col. 861, 15, cols. 1531-2, and 6, col. 813. Cf., however, Shlomo Tal, *Op. cit.*, and *Mahzor Rinnat Yisra'el le-Rosh ha-Shanah — Nusah Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 409, note.

While it provoked no actual bloodshed, initially at least, the first of a long series of blood libels in Christian Europe was aimed against the Jews of Norwich, after a 12-year-old lad was found murdered in a nearby wood on March 24, 1144. Despite strenuous opposition from the local clergy, interested parties fostered a cult of “the boy martyr,” who was eventually canonized as St. William of Norwich.⁵ Anti-Jewish hatred, similarly whipped up in the course of time, created “Little St. Hugh of Lincoln” (1255), whose fate was to inspire one of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Imported from England to the European mainland, however, “ritual murder” charges soon had bloody and catastrophic results.

The process of executing Jews for their alleged kidnapping, torture, and murder of Christian children, began in northern France. There, on Wednesday, May 26, 1171, some three dozen Jews — the entire community of Blois — were burned at the stake. “As the flames mounted high,” according to an eyewitness, “the martyrs began to sing in unison a melody that began softly but ended with a full voice.” It transpired that they had chosen *Aleynu le-shabbe’ah* as their defiant hymn of faith, and even the grim churchmen present could not help wondering at the melodious strains. When news of the tragedy reached Orleans, Rabbenu Jacob Tam, Rashi’s grandson, proclaimed a 24-hour fast to be observed by all the Jewish communities in France, England, and the Rhineland, on the appropriate Hebrew date (20th Sivan). Among those who wrote *kinot* in honor of the Blois martyrs was Ephraim of Bonn, who also included a detailed account in his *Book of Remembrance* chronicle.⁶

The fast instituted by Rabbenu Tam is now little more than a historical footnote. What served to commemorate and glorify the *Kiddush ha-Shem* of 1171, however, was the *Aleynu* prayer. Until then, it had been chanted during the *Musaf* service on both days of Rosh ha-Shanah only; from the late 12th century, among the Jewish communities of northwestern Europe, the practice developed of reciting *Aleynu* at weekday morning services and in the Yom Kippur *Musaf* as well. Before long, as a credo almost on a par with *Shema Yisra’el*, it was read at the conclusion of every daily service.⁷ On the High Holy Days, the opening

5. See Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World* (New York/Philadelphia, 1960 edn.), pp. 121-6; Lipman, *Op. cit.*, pp. 50-57.

6. Ephraim of Bonn, *Sefer Zekhirah*, ed. A.M. Habermann, in *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zarefat* (Jerusalem, 1945), pp. 124-6. For an English translation, see Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, pp. 127-130. Ephraim’s account of the Blois tragedy was later utilized by the historiographer Joseph Ha-Kohen (*Emek ha-Bakha* or *La Vallée des Pleurs*, 1558): see J.H. Hertz, *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book with Commentary* (revised edn., London, 1959), pp. 209 and 551; Arzt, *Justice and Mercy*, pp. 181-2. The relevant data first appeared in A. Neubauer and M. Stern, *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin, 1892), pp. 66-68.

7. Bernard M. Casper, *Talks on Jewish Prayer* (Jerusalem, 1958), pp. 56-61; Gabriel Sivan,

lines were chanted to an ancient, solemn prayer mode, and the two paragraphs were read separately; on all other occasions, they formed one continuous affirmation of Jewish faith — stressing Israel's unique role as *Am Segulah*, a treasured people, negating idolatry, and voicing the universalist hope for “a world perfected under the kingship of the Almighty (*le-takken olam be-malkhut Shaddai*). So deeply did the background events and the significance of this prayer impress themselves on the Jewish world, that all other communities also made *Aleynu* part of their daily worship.

At Blois, innocent men, women, and children had been burned to death on the orders of Count Thibaud “the Good.” Over a century later, at Troyes (the birthplace of Rashi), it was the Passover festival that once again furnished the pretext for a “ritual murder” accusation, but the circumstances were different. This time, the alleged victim's body was smuggled into the home of R. Isaac Châtelain, a local Jewish notable, on March 26, 1288 (Good Friday), so that conspirators might “discover” it there during Passover. Furthermore, the subsequent investigation was conducted by Franciscan and Dominican friars rather than by a Christian layman, and 13 Jews — including Châtelain's entire family — rejected a conditional pardon, choosing martyrdom instead of apostasy. Handed over to the “secular arm” a month after their arrest, the Jews defiantly recited the *Shema* until they perished amid the flames.⁸

In most respects, the torments inflicted on these 13th-century French Jews were a foretaste of the horrors endured later by tens of thousands, under the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition, apart from the fact that the Troyes martyrs were professing Jews — not unrepentant judaizing “New Christians.” The *Kiddush ha-Shem* of 1288 sent shock waves through the Jewish communities of northern Europe, and inspired the composition of half a dozen elegies. Two were written by Jacob ben Judah de Lotra, the first in Hebrew and the second (*La Complainte de Troyes*) in Judeo-French, basically the poet's Old French daily language transcribed into Hebrew characters.⁹ “*Prêchons vinre(n)t Rav Yizhak Cohen rekerir,*” the 14th stanza begins, telling how the blandishments offered by the preaching friars, who threatened him with the alternative of death, were spurned by R. Isaac le Prestre, a major victim of the conspiracy.

From all of the evidence available, bad news did not take long to “SABC Selects an Ancient Prayer,” in *Jewish Affairs* (Johannesburg, March 1977), pp. 25-28.

8. *Ej*, Vol. 15, col. 1407; C. Lehrmann, *L'Élément juif dans la littérature française*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1960), pp. 39-41. A similar attempt to incriminate a Jewish notable is described in Heinrich Heine's fragmentary romance, *Der Rabbi von Bacharach* (chapter 1).

9. Both poems, discovered in a Vatican Library manuscript, were first published by Arsène Darmesteter (*Romania*, Vol. 3, 1874, pp. 443-486).

reach other Jewish communities in the Middle Ages. If exemplary acts of *Kiddush ha-Shem* figured among the grim reports, as Rabbenu Tam's message to the Jews of England (after the Blois tragedy) seems to indicate, it is reasonable to assume that a few outstanding hymns and elegies circulated far and wide. The *Complainte de Troyes* may have been read by some English Jews shortly before their expulsion in 1290; *U-Netanneh Tokef* and the *Av ha-Rahamim* "martyrs' requiem" may never even have gained acceptance in the North French rite, which gave way to the Rhenish Ashkenazi form of worship some time in the 14th century. One thing, however, is clear: by 1287, when R. Jacob ben Judah Hazzan of London wrote his voluminous *Ez Hayyim* compendium, the *Aleynu* prayer had already been incorporated in the daily services of medieval Anglo-Jewry.¹⁰ As for those original "Hymns of the Isles" which we shall next consider, specifically local events may have been their theme, but the poetic traditions of France and the Rhineland contributed greatly to their Hebrew style and mode of expression.

Yom Tov of Joigny: the London and York Massacres (1189-90)

While still resident in his native France, R. Yom Tov ben Isaac of Joigny, the eminent Tosafist and *paytan*, had composed one of the moving elegies on the Blois martyrs of 1171. Nine years later, he took ship for England and settled in the important northern city of York. Few could then have suspected that this illustrious newcomer would himself play a leading role in perhaps the most horrendous Jewish calamity of that fearful age.

With the onset of the Third Crusade (1189-92), English Jewry's situation took a final turn for the worse. Popular anti-Semitism was readily whipped up by malevolent priests, envious merchants, and certain noblemen who owed money to the Jews. Despite royal protection, the latter discovered to their cost that local authorities were often incapable of defending Jewish lives and property against outbreaks of mob violence. Thus, at the coronation of Richard I, in September 1189, a delegation of Anglo-Jewish notables bearing gifts for the new king was first humiliated by palace guards outside Westminster Abbey, after which the London rabble vented its fury on the capital's Jewish inhabitants in a 24-hour rampage of murder, arson, and looting. Efforts to quell the disturbances proved futile: rather than fall victim to the mob, some Jews committed suicide while others were driven to accept baptism. Richard Coeur de Lion subsequently had three instigators of the riot executed, and published a decree banning any such lawlessness. Once he set out for the Holy Land, however, the decree was ignored

10. See Israel Brodie's edition of the *Ez Hayyim*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1962), pp. 98 and 209 (High Holy Days), and p. 126 (weekdays). Here, the weekday text of *Aleynu* is greatly expanded, and differs markedly from the version in current use.

by other rabble-rousers, and anti-Jewish violence spread from London to towns throughout the kingdom.¹¹

R. Yom Tov of Joigny — or, as he was later to become known, Yom Tov of York — did not witness the September riots, but it is widely believed that they had a major impact on the composition of his *Omnam Ken* hymn. Since around 1200, in the Ashkenazi rite, *Omnam Ken* has formed part of the Yom Kippur eve (*Kol Nidre*) service. In most High Holy Day *mahzorim*, this tautly written *piyyut* now figures as an alphabetical acrostic of 11 two-line stanzas, omitting the original first strophe which incorporates the author's name, Yom Tov.¹² The theme of *Omnam Ken* is man's obligation to "render an account" before the Divine throne on each Atonement Day. Transgression admittedly results from man's surrender to his evil impulse (*yezer ha-ra*), and a long list of misdeeds is traditionally catalogued; yet, if only God will take the patriarch Abraham's merit into account and listen to the remorseful supplications of His people Israel, He must surely answer each plea with *Salahti* — "I have forgiven!" In *Peneh le-elbon*, one of the concluding stanzas, a reflection of English Jewry's miserable plight at this time can be detected: "Note our humiliation and place it in the balance, as an atonement for our sins. Wipe away our offense, and proclaim good tidings to all who trust in You . . ."

Jews of Western Europe reserve a traditional solemn melody for *Omnam Ken*, and a rhymed alphabetical English version by Israel Zangwill is justly famous:

Ay, 'tis thus	Evil us	hath in bond;
By Thy grace	guilt efface	and respond,
		"Forgiven!"
		...
Voice that sighs,	tear-filled eyes,	do not spurn;
Weigh and pause,	plead my cause,	and return
		"Forgiven!"
Yea, off-rolled —	as foretold —	clouds impure,
Zion's folk,	free of yoke,	O assure
		"Forgiven!"

Six months after the London riots, a culminating bloodbath took place in York.¹³ There are several accounts of this momentous tragedy,

11. For Ephraim of Bonn's account of the London riot, see Habermann, *Gezerot*, p. 127. The background is traced by Jacobs (*Angevin England*, pp. 77, 112-133), Roth (*England*, pp. 22-4, 270), and Margolis and Marx (*History*, pp. 386ff.).

12. Some Israeli editions of the High Holiday prayer book now include this opening stanza, e.g., *Mahzor le-Yom Kippur — Nusah Sefarad* (Koren Publishers; Jerusalem, 1989), ed. Daniel Goldschmidt, pp. 75-6. Other information can be found in Arzi, *Op. cit.*, pp. 211-2, and Philip Goodman, *The Yom Kippur Anthology* (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 62-64.

13. For fuller information, see Jacobs, *Op. cit.*; A.M. Hyamson, *A History of the Jews in England* (London, 1928), chapter 5; Roth, *Op. cit.*; Marcus, *Op. cit.*, pp. 131-6; *Ej*, Vol.

one by Ephraim of Bonn in his *Sefer Zekhirah* (later incorporated in Joseph Ha-Kohen's *Emek ha-Bakha*) and another by the contemporary English churchman, William of Newburgh.¹⁴ Jewish historians naturally link the "York massacre" with crusading fanaticism, whereas even baser motives are referred to by William of Newburgh. He maintains that a gang of unscrupulous Yorkshire knights incited common folk against the Jews so as to destroy all evidence of their own financial indebtedness to them.

The men of York were restrained neither by fear of the hot-tempered king, nor the vigour of the laws, nor by feelings of humanity, from satiating their fury . . . [They acted] without any scruple of Christian conscience, thirsting for the blood of the infidels out of greed for booty.

As an additional pretext for the disturbances, it was alleged that "a famous Doctor of the Law had come from abroad to teach the English Jews," and this newcomer — presumably Yom Tov of Joigny (who had actually been living in York for the past ten years) — became the chief target of the rabble.

When the disorders broke out, in March 1190, the first house to be attacked and pillaged was that of a Jewish notable, Benedict of York, who had undergone a forced conversion during the earlier riots in London.¹⁵ Over the next few days, renewed lawlessness, murder, and the prospect of having to choose between death and baptism, led most of the Jewish community to seek refuge in the royal castle. Fearing that its warden might betray them, the terrified Jews denied him re-entry to the fortress, whereupon a siege was organized by the sheriff of York. It is clear, from William of Newburgh's objective account, that the conspirators engineered this entire affair: to dispose of their Jewish creditors, they incited the ignorant mob, offered easy pickings to would-be crusaders, fanned the sheriff's fury, and even enlisted the support of local clerics. Vast numbers of armed townsmen and country folk gathered like vultures at a kill; John Marshal, the county's sheriff, evidently made a belated attempt to call off the siege, but the bloodthirsty rabble could no longer be restrained, seeing the Jews and their valuables almost within their grasp.

Though short of food and weapons, the besieged Jews held out in Clifford's Tower for several days, until it became obvious that they were doomed. What followed was an act of mass suicide, after the wood-

6, col. 748, and Vol. 16, cols. 848-9; Margolis and Marx, *Op. cit.*, pp. 387-8.

14. In Ephraim of Bonn's rather sketchy account (Habermann, *Gezerot*, p. 127), the Hebrew equivalent of York is *Eborvakh* (Lat. *Eboracum*), while the focus of events is said to have been a synagogue — rather than York Castle. The other, much more detailed and extensive account, by William of Newburgh (*Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, Book IV, chapters 7-11), displays unusual objectivity for that time.

15. Whether Benedict survived the journey back to York remains unclear: cf. the details provided by Margolis and Marx (p. 386), Marcus (p. 132), and the *EJ* (Vol. 16, col. 848).

en tower had been set afire, in a way reminiscent of the defiant self-sacrifice at Masada. Traditionally, Yom Tov inspired the 150 Jews to perform this *Kiddush ha-Shem*, declaring that “we prefer a glorious death to a shameful life.” This ghastly event took place on Friday night, 16th March 1190, and those Jews who remained alive in the tower (being prepared to convert) were butchered without mercy when the “promiscuous and numberless mob” broke into the castle a few hours later, on Saturday morning. For the triumphant Christians, who completed the York massacre, it was the eve of Palm Sunday; for the slaughtered Jews, it would have been *Shabbat ha-Gadol*, the “Great Sabbath” immediately before Passover. By a grim irony, the prophetic *Haftarah* reading for that day (Malachi 3:4-24) opens with the verse, “Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in days of old,” and concludes with an assurance of Divine judgment and salvation on “the great and terrible day of the Lord.”

Once reports of the slaughter, which directly contravened his edict, reached King Richard overseas, he instructed his regent, the Bishop of Ely, to take vengeance on the perpetrators. During the time that had elapsed, however, the rabble had dispersed, and the guilty knights — having burned all records of their debts in York Cathedral — had fled to Scotland, where they could brazenly defy English justice. The regent, therefore, had to content himself with imposing a fine on the citizens of York and dismissing the sheriff, allowing the conspirators and their murderous dupes to go scot-free.

As on previous occasions, various elegiac *piyyutim* were dedicated to the martyrs of York, although none composed in England have been identified. The surviving elegies include two which figure among the *kinot* for Tish'ah be-Av, the Ninth of Av fast day commemorating the Temple's destruction.¹⁶ One, by R. Menaḥem ben Jacob of Worms, entitled *Alelai li* (“Woe is me!”), also refers to outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in the Rhineland town of Boppard (1179, 1196). The last ten stanzas, from *Mah tithappekhi herev kol sevivayikh telahati* (“Sword, why turn in all directions, consuming all around you?”), are concerned with the events of 1190 in the “Isles of the Sea” — England. They contain an acrostic of Menaḥem's name. Another *piyyut*, by R. Joseph ben Asher of Chartres, deals exclusively with the York outrage, shows greater familiarity with the events and people concerned, and is entitled *Elohim be'alunu zulatekha adonim* (“O God! Other lords besides You have ruled over us . . .”). An alphabetical acrostic of 27 rhymed stanzas, this *piyyut* is notable for its many Biblical allusions. Both elegies have been translated into English and have attracted scholarly attention.¹⁷ Various He-

16. They appear in Abraham Rosenfeld's *Authorised Kinot for the Ninth of Av* (London, 1965), pp. 168-172; cf. also p. xxv.

17. Their existence was first noted by Leopold Zunz in the mid-19th century, and a learned article devoted to these *piyyutim* by Cecil Roth appeared in the *Transactions of*

brew terms are used to designate England — *Erez ha-Iy* ("the Land of the Isle"), *Iyyey ha-Yam* ("the Isles of the Sea"), or (quoting Isaiah 42:12) in Menaḥem ben Jacob's plea for Divine retribution, simply "the Isles."

In stanzas 8-9 of this poem, R. Joseph of Chartres is unfair to Richard Coeur de Lion, making the "king of the Isles" primarily responsible for the carnage. Apart from endeavouring to protect his Jewish subjects, Richard had, of course, been overseas at the time. In general, however, R. Joseph's poetic version of the tragedy agrees with the English chronicler's account:

They gathered at the fortress . . . the prince [warden] oppressed us and the adversary stood at his right hand; we said: "Take our property!" — but "No," they replied, "we have come for Yom Tov" . . .

The foxes' whelps made a great breach, and we knew that the gates of prayer were closed . . .

The martyrs withheld not their only children from You, emulating the deeds of their forefathers . . .

They sought You in distress when Your chastening was upon them; each one rendered up his soul and poured out his blood . . .

May their dust find repose in the bond of eternal life; for this is the heritage of the Lord's servants and their just reward.¹⁸

Today, nearly 800 years after those dire events, the Jewish historical consciousness is still haunted by them. A modern French writer, André Schwarz-Bart, for example, turns the *Kiddush ha-Shem* at York into the starting-point for his novel, *Le Dernier des Justes* (1959), where the legendary Thirty-Six Hidden Saints are transformed into a dynasty stretching from medieval England to Auschwitz. Apart from distorting the concept of *Lamed Vav Zaddikim*, Schwarz-Bart goes out of his way to depict the mass suicide in a grossly inaccurate fashion.¹⁹ Justice is far better served by a commemorative plaque which was unveiled at Clifford's Tower in York, on the last day of *Tishrei* 5739 (31st October 1978). Britain's Chief Rabbi, Immanuel Jakobovits, and the Archbishop of York, took part in this dedication ceremony, held under the auspices of the Jewish Historical Society of England. A Hebrew verse, "Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the Isles" (Isaiah 42:12), follows the main inscription:

On the night of Friday, 16 March 1190, some 150 Jews and Jewesses

the Jewish Historical Society of England, Vol. 16 (London, 1952), pp. 213-220. In Habermann's *Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zarefat*, the full text of Menaḥem ben Jacob's *kinah* appears on pp. 147-151, and that of Joseph ben Asher is on pp. 152-4; Rosenfeld's edition of the *Kinot* includes only the "English" portion of Menaḥem's elegy, as translated by Solomon Schechter.

18. Extracts quoted from Rosenfeld, *The Authorised Kinot*, pp. 169-170 (slightly amended by the present writer).

19. For example, the year in which the York massacre occurred is arbitrarily changed to 1185; William of Newburgh is re-named "Dom Bracton"; the mob violence is incited by a bishop; and "Rabbi Yom Tov Lévy" dispatches at least 250 Jews — "some say a thousand."

of York, having sought protection in the Royal Castle on this site from a mob incited by Richard Malebisse and others, chose to die at each other's hands rather than renounce their faith.

Meir ben Elijah and the Expulsion of the Jews from England (1290)

As mentioned earlier in this article, it was an economically and numerically impoverished *kehillah* that departed from his realm when Edward I signed the decree expelling Jewish residents on 18th July 1290. According to tradition, that date coincided with Tish'ah be-Av 5050. Until the late 19th century, no reflection of that Anglo-Jewish twilight had ever been detected in the Hebrew literature of the Middle Ages. Thanks, however, to the pioneering researches of Abraham Berliner and A.M. Habermann, it appears that the Jews of medieval England could boast a talented liturgical poet who flourished in the years preceding the expulsion, and whose works have survived in a Vatican manuscript. This *paytan*, Meir ben Elijah, or "Rabbi Meir of England," evidently lived (for some time at least) in Norwich, where he served as *hazzan* of the local Jewish community.²⁰ Well over a dozen of his poems are extant, on religious and secular themes, the lengthiest of these — *Mitnassei ba-Marom al Kerovo* ("Uplifted on high upon His cherub") — running to no less than 216 lines. Based on the Exodus from Egypt and meant to be recited on Passover, this poem is a remarkable acrostic: the initial Hebrew letters of the first four stanzas spell the author's name (Meir), the next 22 are alphabetical, and the remainder form a pious, illuminating signature. It reads: *Ani Me'ir be-Rabbi Eliyyahu mi-Medinat Norgiz asher be-Erez ha-Iy ha-nikre'ah Angleterre, egdal be-Torat Bore'i u-ve-yir'ato, Amen Amen Selah* — "I am Meir, son of Rabbi Elijah from the city of Norwich, which is in the Land of the Isle known as England; may I [continue to] grow in the Law of my Creator and in the fear of Him, Amen, Amen, Selah!" Biblical and Midrashic echoes abound in this *piyyut*, and one typical extract follows:

Abraham, a blossom among thorns . . .
 just and upright was he.
 Shattering the false gods, he told the idolatrous king:
 "How can you worship vain images, when the Lord God considers
 it an abomination?"
 Then [Nimrod] ordered him to be cast into the fire,
 yet he remained true to the Lord his King,
 Knowing Him to be that same God who answers by fire.²¹

20. See Lipman, *The Jews of Medieval Norwich*, pp. 157-9; *EJ*, Vol. 11, col. 1253. After rediscovering Meir's works, Berliner published them in a limited edition of 25 copies only (London, 1887). A complete Hebrew text, transcribed with an introduction and detailed notes by A.M. Habermann, forms a special 46-page supplement to Lipman's volume.

21. Lines 75-80 (Lipman, *Norwich*, Hebrew supplement, p. 22), as translated by the present writer.

More interesting still, because of its historical uniqueness, is another poem made up of double acrostics spelling *Eliyyahu Hazak* — a continuation of the *paytan*'s signature (*Me'ir be-Rabbi*) in the one before it. The opening phrase, *Oyevi bi-me'eyrah Tikkov* ("My enemy with execration may You curse . . ."), has to be understood in the context of this poem's heading: *Al Koved ha-Galut ve-Haregot ha-Kele ve-Khilyon ha-Mamon* — literally, "On the Severity of the Exile, and the Massacres of Imprisonment, and the Destruction of Property." Each three-line stanza concludes with the prayer, "You, Who are great and glorious, may You turn darkness into light." According to one view,²² the phrasing indicates that Meir of Norwich was among the Jews expelled from England in 1290. An alternative view,²³ concerning the *piyyut*'s date and significance, is that the composer may only have originated from Norwich, and that the trials which are referred to in the heading might well have been the persecutions of 1278-9, as a result of which large numbers of English Jews were executed or imprisoned and forfeited their property.

However, key phrases in stanzas 5, 8, 11, and 14-17, as well as much of the poem's content, undermine this assumption that Meir's poem was written a decade before the expulsion. There is, after all, more than a hint of despair and of some impending doom in the following lines:

Our wrongs they aggravate, and they consume us,
Forever urging: "Let us plunder them till daylight!"
You, who are great and glorious, turn darkness into light . . .

The time has come to save him [English Jewry?], ere he perish in exile;
For they rise up to destroy him, casting gloom over light.
You, who are great and glorious, turn darkness into light!

All his life he clung to hope, day by day [sought] consolation;
O awesome One above, bring Your justice to light!
You, who are great and glorious, turn darkness into light.

Though You let the foe beset me, rise up now and take my side.
Give dominion to my Prince, for in Your light we see light.
You, who are great and glorious, turn darkness into light!²⁴

Nor can it be denied that one phrase in the heading — *ve-Haregot ha-Kele* ("and the Massacres of Imprisonment") — makes no sense at all unless the literal meaning of *Kele* is disregarded. In *gematria* (in Jewish tradition, finding meaning in the numerical values of Hebrew letters), the

22. I.e., Habermann's (Lipman, *Op. cit.*, pp. 2 and 13 of the Hebrew supplement).

23. This is Lipman's own suggestion (*ibid.*, p. 158); for the reasons given, Habermann's argument seems more convincing to the present writer.

24. Lines 13-15 (stanza 5) and 43-51 (stanzas 15-17), on pp. 14 and 16 of the Hebrew supplement, as translated by the present writer.

three Hebrew letters of that word have the numerical value of 51, and, according to one opinion, they stand for the Hebrew year (50)51, which began on Rosh ha-Shanah in the autumn of 1290. King Edward's decree, expelling the Jews, was promulgated in July, but they were given a little more than three months (until 1st November, All Saints' Day) to quit the realm. The likelihood is, therefore, that Meir of Norwich wrote *Oyevi bi-me'eyrah Tikkov* either in England (shortly before the expulsion took effect) or some time afterwards (when "the Severity of the Exile" had driven him overseas), and that his poem marks the last burst of Jewish creativity in the island kingdom.

Conclusion

At the end of the 13th century, all that remained of a once flourishing English *kehillah* were a few stone dwellings and artifacts, as well as a handful of Jewish apostates housed in the London *Domus Conversorum*. Many of the 1290 exiles presumably re-established themselves in France, but their descendants would later have merged with the German-speaking Ashkenazim who fled to new lands of dispersion. Toughened by persecution, recurrent wandering, and confinement to ghettos, they became sharply differentiated from their Sephardi brethren, large numbers of whom either converted or led an underground, crypto-Jewish existence in Spain and Portugal after the last decade of the 15th century.²⁵

A longing for Redemption and a spirit of defiant optimism permeate the Hymns of the Isles. They are a poignant reminder of successive, tragic experiences in *Galut* and of the pressing need for a restored Jewish national life and homeland. How many Jews of today can trace their ancestry back to medieval times, let alone to 13th century England? Those with family roots in the English-speaking West prior to 1870 are also a tiny percentage. Nevertheless, it is an intriguing thought that some of our distant forefathers may well have been those brave souls who faced massacre, blood libel, and other instances of Christian oppression throughout the dark period of Anglo-French Jewry — and who chose to accept their fate as Jews rather than renounce their faith.

25. On the aftermath of the expulsion, see Margolis and Marx, *Op. cit.*, p. 391; H.G. Richardson, *The English Jewry under Angevin Kings* (London, 1960), pp. 3, 228-233; Lipman, *Op. cit.*, pp. 184-5; *EJ*, Vol. 6, cols. 751-2. Much interesting and relevant information about the medieval Franco-German communities appears in *Ashkenaz: The German Jewish Heritage*, ed. Gertrude Hirschler (Yeshiva University Museum, New York, 1988), especially in the essays by Israel Ta-Shema, Eric Zimmer, and Alexander Carlebach (pp. 23-56, 151-177, and 209-233).

“Let Every Living Thing Yah’s Praises Sing”

ERIC L. FRIEDLAND

WHEN QOHELET ONCE REMARKED, “OF THE making of books there is no end,” he was obviously registering a complaint, and perhaps for good reason, and, no doubt, one that many can promptly identify with. Of the composition of Jewish prayerbooks, too, there has been little letup, both in previous ages and, markedly, in the last two decades. While some might be dismayed by this apparent fissiparous tendency of prayer manuals aplenty, others are heartened by the ceaseless desire for giving fresh expression to the yearning for, and communion with, the Divine. It might be observed that, upon the issuance of nearly every new rite with its quest for the innovative, formerly neglected traditional texts are frequently, and paradoxically, resurrected. The latest of these rituals, displaying alike venturesomeness and atavism, is the Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshamah* for Shabbat Eve, just months old.

The creators of the first Reconstructionist *Siddur*, *The Sabbath Prayer Book* (1945), maintained a basically traditional text for Shabbat Evening, Morning, and Afternoon Services, excising or rewording only those verses that, for its users, were doctrinally untenable (e.g., the Chosen People concept, the privileged position of the *Kohanim*, the rebuilding of the Temple, etc.), sharply curtailing the Preliminary Benedictions (*Birkhot ha-Shahar*), and all but entirely revamping the *Musaf* (Additional) Service. Here and there new prayers in Hebrew and in English were inserted, usually as possible alternatives.

The showpiece of *The Sabbath Prayer Book*, and all the subsequent liturgical volumes of the Reconstructionist Movement, was the Supplement, made up of prayers, poems, hymns, and responsive readings drawn from Biblical times all the way to the early 1900s. The themes had to do chiefly with a variation on the classic triad of God, Torah, and Israel: The Sabbath, God, Torah, Zion, and America. Interestingly, the very movement that has been criticized from both left and right for harboring a much-diminished God-concept, devoted one-third of *The Sabbath Prayer Book* Supplement’s pages to God — and none, strictly speaking, to Jewish peoplehood, ostensibly the heart of Reconstructionist theology. Having such imposing lineage, the 1989 rite for Shabbat

ERIC L. FRIEDLAND is Sanders Professor of Judaic Studies at Wright State University, the University of Dayton, and United Theological Seminary.

Eve has much to build on and, as it were, a formidable challenge to grapple with. Has *Kol Haneshamah* been able to meet the twin challenges of its considerable legacy and the demands posed by the last decades of the twentieth century?

The feature of the new prayerbook that will doubtless capture the attention of, if not instantly captivate, the reader is the layout. There are some good calligraphy and illustrative graphics, foremost of the latter being the stylized cityscape of Jerusalem (for the sabbatical/festal *Hashkivenu*) and an esthetically pleasing, exoteric, bilingual *Mizrah* (or *Shivviti*, from the opening word of the eighth verse from Psalm 16, "I have set the LORD before me continually"), occupying a whole page and timely positioned just before the *Amidah*. The prayerbooks edited during the '70s and '80s by Lionel Blue and Jonathan Magonet, of the Reform Movement in Great Britain, have been accustomed to embracing illustrations, including woodcuts, every so often within their pages. As welcome a departure as these are — *Passover Haggadot* need not have a monopoly in this area — one wishes, somehow, that there were more.

This manual breaks precedent by locating the Hebrew text on the left and the English translation on the right, conceivably to ease the transition from one language to another. Also without parallel is the extent to which transliteration is provided for the Hebrew texts which the congregation chants or reads aloud in unison or antiphonally. A need is being filled, but at a price. A single example should suffice, as in the case of *Emet ve-Emunah*, which comes directly after the *Shema* and its attendant scriptural passages. The expanded Hebrew text runs to a couple of pages, the English but one page. An interpretive English version of *Emet ve-Emunah* faces the second half of the prayer. One not conversant in Hebrew but wishing to pick it up through the prayerbook has, here, real obstacles to contend with. The path blazed by John Rayner and Chaim Stern, of the Liberal Movement in England, in their *Service of the Heart* and *Gate of Repentance* is, instructionally, doubtless the most effective. In their liturgical publications, the Hebrew and English appear together on a single page and are matched and aligned in remarkable proximity, line by line. The old Magill's linear cribs have been bested! As the present Friday Evening *Kol Haneshamah* is essentially a provisional, introductory edition, I suggest that the Hebrew and the English be placed in close juxtaposition, in the Rayner-Stern fashion, on one page, and the transliteration on the opposite page, along with the fine expository-edificatory commentary, which, in the current edition, comes in view at the bottom of the page beneath the line. To save space and add focus, it might be an idea to take as a model the Israeli Orthodox *Rinat Yisrael*, which gives its Biblical citations in the margins next to the verses quoted. To be sure, the overall look would be materially altered. However, the Hebraically-untutored congregant

or visitor might thus be able to acquire some vocabulary and reading skills in our ancestral tongue, instead of falling on the mercies of the transliterator or being completely under the rule of rote.

Another eye-catching feature is the vigorous translation of the Hebrew text, for the most part ably and cunningly executed by the American Jewish poet, Joel Rosenberg. The way that the Psalms come to life again at his hand, in contemporary and at times colloquial idiom, is paralleled by Jonathan Magonet's efforts in the British Reform *Siddur*. In places [re]interpretation — or, more precisely, eisegesis — will enter the picture, as the verse which literally reads “And may [all] Israel, hallowers of Your Name, rest thereon” (i.e., the Sabbath), is transformed in a more universalist direction by Rosenberg into “Let all Israel, and all who treat Your name as holy, rest upon this day.” Quibble as one may, one is rarely disappointed by the translation in *Kol Haneshamah*. There can be no genuine opposition, for instance, to the not inappropriate use of the name “Matthew” over “Mattathias” in the *Amidah* insert for Hanukkah, the *Al ha-Nissim* prayer, as both names go back to the Hebrew *Mattityahu* (the father of the Maccabee brothers; literally, “gift of the LORD”). Among notable exceptions is the strained, shapeless rendition of the lovely metaphor in the *Hashkivenu* prayer, “shelter us in the shadow of Your wings” (because of its zoomorphism or avian imagery?), a fleeting lapse into prosaicism. Even worse, it must be admitted, are the stiff Englishings of *Adon Olam* (even if this rendition is by the venerated Mordecai M. Kaplan himself) and *Yigdal*, which are anything but hymnic or inspiring. The editors might have consulted the inviting last chapter of Cecil Roth's *Essays and Portraits in Anglo-Jewish History* (Philadelphia, 1962) entitled “English Versions of Adon Olam” for some clues on how to transpose the stately Hebrew hymn into matching English. It is revealing — and no less reassuring — that those responsible for the American Reform *Gates of Prayer* and *Gates of Repentance* have seen fit to preserve Frederick de Sola Mendes' metrical rendition (alongside a fairly literal one), which is well over a century old, because the language chimes and sings! For whatever reason(s), the Sabbath Table Hymns (*Zemirot*) in *Kol Haneshamah's* Readings go untranslated. About the only translation of a Hebrew song in the present volume that reads and scans nicely is Zalman Shalomi-Schachter's *cantabile* paraphrase of the mystical-amatory *Yedid Nefesh*, which the Conservatives have also put to use in their *Siddur Sim Shalom*.

The novel (non-)translation of the entire prayerbook is certainly the term “Yah,” in Latin characters, for the sacrosanct Tetragrammaton (YHVH) in place of the customary “Lord” (which really defines the surrogate name, *Adonay*, rather than the unutterable Name itself). The reclamation of this ancient variant of the four-lettered name of God satisfies a fourfold need: using the specific name of God not shared, generically, by any other deity; avoiding pronouncing the sacred Name

in its entirety (in partial application of the Second Commandment); keeping away from terms connoting male domination, like “Lord”; and putting to advantage the manifold mystical meanings that have come to be associated with the Name. Many a Sephardic or Oriental prayerbook of kabbalistic provenance would highlight the Name and insert particular markings as a way of indicating the Name’s significance in a given context, according to its position in the sephirothic realm. The creators of *Kol Haneshamah* picked up on this liturgical practice of unfolding the multiple latent meanings of the Name. Whenever the term “Yah” appears, a Divine attribute (not, however, always in the sephirothic scheme) is assigned underneath it, e.g., ^{Yah}beloved, usually according to the context or theme of the liturgical or scriptural text in *Kol Haneshamah*. This inspired recovery of a traditional practice, begun by the sixteenth-century Safed mystics, unquestionably adds theological richness and sophistication to the prayerbook. At one level, one is prompted to think about those qualities that s/he would attach to Divinity and seek to emulate.

While there is no gainsaying the importance of the translation and the readings in a prayerbook, the center of gravity remains the Hebrew text of the liturgy. The Reconstructionists have always been sensitive to the wording of the Hebrew, and took liberties to emend whenever it was considered necessary. The editors of *Kol Haneshamah* have, on the one hand, revived many a traditional text (e.g., selections from the Song of Songs for *Kabbalat Shabbat*) and, on the other, gone a good deal further than their predecessors in the work of emendation, mostly in the way of addition. The older Reconstructionist rites were wont to replace the second passage of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 11:13-21), describing the bounties of nature that will follow upon the Israelites’ ethical behavior, with Deuteronomy 11:21 and 28:1-6 (selected), promising length of days and the blessings of prosperity respectively. The present rite removes 11:21, retains *all* of 28:1-6 (unexpurgated to the point of including “the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth,” here palliated to “^{YAH}THE ULTIMATE will make of you a model for all nations of the earth”), and embraces 30:15-19. This last verse is the famous passage where the gauntlet is thrown before the people, and they are admonished *u-vaharta ba-hayyim*, “but choose life!” This identical passage, with one extra verse about the “land sworn to the fathers,” relieves the *Shema*’s second paragraph in *Ha-Avodah sheba-Lev*, the liturgy of the Progressive congregations in Israel. That same Israeli *siddur* lies behind the update and amplification of the prayer unit that follows the *Shema*, *Emet ve-Emunah*. All mention of revenge is dropped, for the reasons explained in the commentary, but, perversely enough, terms for enemy keep cropping up in the enlarged text, which is far from the case in the Israeli analogue.

It is the *Amidah* that has seen the most textual changes, more ex-

tensively than in any previous Reconstructionist liturgical endeavor. As in the Reform *Gates of Prayer*, Psalm 51:15 (“O LORD, open my lips . . .”) is restored as a directive and foreword to the Seven Benedictions, or the Sabbath *Amidah*. The first benediction joins the four Matriarchs with the Patriarchs and adjusts the eulogy, or conclusion, “Blessed are you, ^{YAH}_{KIND ONE}, Shield of Abraham and help of Sarah.” Members of the New-Age P’nai Or movement, and rabbinical students and faculty worshipping in the Scheuer Chapel on the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute, have been reciting the first section of the *Amidah* in this gender-inclusive version for some time now. The second benediction, ordinarily on the theme of resurrection or immortality, is given a verbal twist similar to the locution in *Gates of Prayer* (deriving from Samuel Adler’s revision in the 1864 edition of *Seder Tefillah* for Temple Emanu-El, New York City, and tracing ultimately to Nehemiah 9:6), and its eulogy, *Barukh attah Adonay, mehayyeh kol hay*, is opportunely translated “Blessed are you, ^{YAH}_{REVIVER}, who gives and renews life.” With our slowly awakening ecological sense, the editors were right to bring back the seasonal inserts, *e.g.*, “You make the wind blow and the rain fall.”

The first of the concluding three benedictions, the *Avodah* (“worship”), adds the word *lahav* (“flame”) to the old Reform/Reconstructionist version, with its entire emphasis on prayer rather than the resuscitation of sacrifices, lending it an emotional, heartfelt quality: “lovingly accept their passionate prayer . . .” (*ve-lahav tefillatam be-ahavah tekabbel . . .*). Arthur Green’s remarks on that phrase in the commentary, showing the connection between *lahav* (“flame”) and the Hasidim’s *hitlahavut* (“enthusiasm”), can well help quicken a worshipper’s prayer-life, to whichever branch of Judaism one may be attached. *Ya’aleh ve-Yavo*, added during the week of a Festival, is closer to the traditional diction, by which not only the Jewish people and their ancestors are recalled, but Jerusalem and the Messiah (slightly rephrased) as well. (Green’s comments *ad locum* the Messiah are essentially modernist.) Then, finally, the prayer for peace applies not just to Israel but to “all who dwell on earth” (*yoshevey tevel*, first employed in this setting by Max D. Klein in his left-of-center Conservative *Seder Avodah* in the fifties and borrowed from the Rosh Hashanah liturgy).

The middle portion of the post-*Amidah* meditation, *Elohay Nezor*, has been refitted with a single sentence containing an admirable peace-loving sentiment, but, unfortunately, in a convoluted syntax. The same goes for a new suggested alternative, a zigzag Hebrew text, to the Traditionalist or former Reconstructionist opening paragraph of the *Aleynu*. Perhaps prayerbook compilers should take to turning to literarily- and liturgically-inclined Israelis for the purpose of editing Hebrew compositions by Americans. The 1945 Sabbath *Siddur*, however, had the services of a non-Israeli, Joseph Marcus, a Jewish medievalist, an omniv-

orous librarian, and superb stylist to boot, for the job of proofreading and magically refashioning the new Hebrew texts.

A glorious aspect of *Kol Haneshamah* lies in the many wonderful, variegated poems by women, largely in the Readings. They enrich the prayerbook immeasurably, and will surely stir its users and perusers to unsuspected levels of sensitivity and spirituality. There are Hebrew pieces by Zelda and Leah Goldberg, Yiddish ones by Malka Heifetz Tussman and Kadia Molodowsky, and English ones by Ruth Brin and Marcia Falk — and many more — every one of them compelling and humanizing. How long we have allowed ourselves to be thus deprived! A woman's fancied perspective, in contrast to her brother's recorded account, of what happened at Sinai forms the subject of the poem "We All Stood Together", and concludes that "If we remembered it together/ we could create holy time/ sparks flying" (Merle Feld). Women ordained at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, too, have made their contributions in the Readings, in the body of the prayer-text, and in the commentary. A disarming *kavvanah* by Sheila Peltz Weinberg before the *Amidah* reads:

Dear God,
Open the blocked passageways to you,
The congealed places.

Roll away the heavy stone from the well as your servant Jacob did when
he beheld his beloved Rachel.

Help us open the doors of trust that have been jammed with hurt and
rejection.

As you open the blossoms in spring,
Even as you open the heavens in storm,
Open us — to feel your great, awesome, wonderful presence.

There is even an alternative, interpretive *Amidah* by Marcia Falk — and two other alternative *Amidot* are provided as well — wherein the fixed frames of each of the seven benedictory units are basically degenderized in the Hebrew (except for the *Avodah* section, where the *Shekhinah* and her return are spoken of), and the poems within each unit are chiefly by talented Jewish poetesses. There is nary a doubt that the incorporation of the feminine is long overdue, and the verses by women here are of a consistently high order, hence all the more welcome.

All the same, a serious question surfaces: Why must the masculine be laundered out of existence — or so it seems — in this volume to make room for the feminine? The *animus* is no less indispensable than the *anima* for the healthy psyche and the healthy society. Is not equilibrium what is called for here? An appalling overcorrection has, perhaps inadvertently, been committed to rectify a historic wrong. The closing verse of Merle Feld's poem above should be borne in mind as valuable corrective and norm: both women and men need to be heard.

It is a hopeful sign that a goodly number of men are beginning to understand themselves better because of what women have been bravely and unerringly articulating about their existential identities. But to eradicate all traces of the masculine would only be woefully misguided and counterproductive.

The appearance of *Kol Haneshamah: Erev Shabbat* is clearly a major literary-liturgical event. The impressive teamwork and *esprit de corps* among rabbis and laity, men and women, people from a wide theological spectrum but with shared principles, philosophers and poets, has yielded highly commendable results. Jews of every persuasion stand to gain from the new, indigenously American, *minhag*, and might even be moved to join the joyous chorus, "Let every living thing [*kol ha-neshamah*] Yah's praises sing, Hallelu-Yah!" (Psalm 150:6).

Developing an American Judaism: Conservative Rabbis as Ethnic Leaders

PAMELA S. NADELL

SCHOLARS OF ETHNICITY, A DIFFICULT term to define, include Jews in their discussions of American sub-groups — like those descended from immigrants from Bohemia and Japan — bound together by historical memory, shared customs, social values, and common language.¹ Students of ethnicity have long recognized that American ethnic groups clung to the religions that their immigrant forebears carried as cultural baggage — along with their feather pillows and copper pots — across the seas.² But they have also demonstrated that one of the hidden costs of the price of passage to America was the adjustment of the content and style of those traditional religious practices.³ Consequently, those studying American Jewry have written much about the shapes and forms of American Jewish religious life, exploring the patterns of rites and rituals followed in the home and the synagogue that resulted from the synthesis of American practices and values with those of Jewish tradition.⁴ By and large, those exploring what Michael A. Meyer has persuasively called “the movements of Jewish religious modernization,” have focused upon the sociological process of adaptation, the ways in which American Jews as a group came to modify their religious heritage within the context of their new host culture, culminating in the creation of distinctly American forms

1. For difficulty with a definition for ethnicity, see Sidney W. Mintz, “Ethnicity and Leadership: An Afterword,” in *Ethnic Leadership in America*, edited by John Higham (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 198-202.

2. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), p. 124. For a discussion of recent literature on ethnicity, see Alan M. Kraut, “My Daughter Tells Me You’re Ethnic,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 7 (Fall 1987): 74-82.

3. Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (1955; rev. ed., Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1960), esp. pp. 27, 31.

4. Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* (1967; 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 45-213; Charles Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York: Summit Books, 1985), pp. 240-67; Steven M. Cohen, *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 71-81.

PAMELA NADELL is Associate professor of Jewish Studies and History, American University, Washington, D.C.

of Judaism.⁵

In connection with studying these changes, it follows automatically that scholars of American Judaism, among them Abraham J. Karp, Charles Liebman, and Jeffrey Gurock, have also written about the rabbinate. Several studies have explored its changing roles, patterns of training, and theological tensions.⁶ Yet, surprisingly, only the most recent scholarship has begun to consider the role of rabbis as ethnic leaders in shaping the process of accommodation and adaptation of Judaism to the American setting.⁷

Social scientists have invented a host of paradigms to explain the wide variety of men and women who emerged to lead their ethnic groups. They have described leaders from the "periphery" or "center," advocates of accommodation or protest, and fosterers of change or tradition.⁸ Recently, historian Victor Greene has looked at leaders he called "ethnic brokers," men — so far, women ethnic leaders have merited little attention — of ability and accomplishment who, as "agents of their groups' adjustment in America," helped "bring into focus the conscious-

5. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xi. For examples, see the sociological studies of Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*; Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (1955; 2nd ed., 1972; rpt. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), pp. 43-128; Chaim I. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), pp. 81-103; Jonathan S. Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 104-38. New and important correctives to the sociological approach to the study of American Judaism are the historical studies of *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Meyer's *Response to Modernity*.

6. Abraham J. Karp, "The Conservative Rabbi — 'Dissatisfied But Not Unhappy,'" *American Jewish Archives* 35 (November 1983): 188-262; Charles S. Liebman, "The Training of American Rabbis," *American Jewish Year Book* 69 (1968): 3-114; Arthur Hertzberg, "The Conservative Rabbinate: A Sociological Study," explored the familial backgrounds of the Conservative rabbinate, in *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought*, ed. Joseph Blau (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 309-32; cf., Daniel P. O'Neill, "The Development of an American Priesthood: The Archbishop John Ireland and the Saint Paul Diocesan Clergy, 1884-1918," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4 (Spring 1985): 33-52.

7. Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Resisters and Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886-1983," *American Jewish Archives* 35 (November 1983): 100-87; in "Modern Orthodox Jews and the Ordeal of Civility," Jenna Weissman Joselit considers the leadership of Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein in shaping New York's Kehillath Jeshurun, in *American Jewish History* 74 (December 1984): 133-41. In a lengthy essay, "The Changing and the Constant in the Reform Rabbinate," David Polish briefly raises the question of the "nature of its leadership — initiating or responding to outer initiatives?" See *American Jewish Archives* 35 (November 1983): 331.

8. Kurt Lewin, "Self Hatred Among Jews," in his *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers in Group Dynamics* (New York: Harper, 1948), pp. 186-200; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), part 9. For a fuller discussion of this, see Benny Kraut, "American Jewish Leaders: The Great, Greater, and Greatest," *American Jewish History* 78 (December 1988): 201-236.

ness of the group and . . . broadcast its identity." By virtue of these individuals' high positions within their group, they earned the esteem of their fellows and were able to wield considerable influence among them. Of the four immigrant-era Jewish ethnic brokers whom he deemed representative men of position and influence — Kasriel Zvi Sarasohn, founder of *Di Yiddishe Gazeten*; David Blaustein, superintendent of the Educational Alliance; lexicographer, translator, and author Alexander Harkavy; and Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* — two, Sarasohn and Blaustein, had been ordained rabbis.⁹

Other historians, notably Mark Bauman, have indeed suggested that some congregational rabbis of the immigrant era were ethnic brokers within their local communities, men whose power and presence reached beyond their synagogue walls as they tried to lead not just their congregations, but the larger Jewish community, to accept their vision of the synthesis of the American and Jewish heritages.¹⁰ Within synagogues and at interfaith meetings, they tried to bridge the gap between American and Jewish cultures, to alleviate some of the tensions associated with the accommodation to America. Whether they advocated reforms in ritual, social service, or interaction with new immigrants, they were paving the way for the Jews of their communities to follow. While other ethnic brokers — settlement house workers, writers, teachers, even gang leaders — might emphasize adaptation to the larger society, Bauman's studies reveal that the rabbinic ethnic brokers, like their Catholic and Protestant counterparts, more often stressed continuity and the maintenance of heritage over accommodation. Rabbinic leaders determined at one and the same time to allow for innovations while conserving as much as possible the traditions essential to the preservation of the group's identity.¹¹

In this article I propose to extend this discussion, not by considering an individual rabbi as ethnic broker or by limiting the study to the immigrant era, but, rather, by studying the collective leadership of one branch of the American rabbinate, the rabbis of Conservative Judaism. In 1901, the then eleven graduates of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Conservative Judaism's rabbinical school, founded an alumni association. Over the course of the twentieth century, Conservative rabbis, working within the association's successor, the Rabbinical Assembly, played a major role in developing Conservative Ju-

9. Victor R. Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910: Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 4, 14-15, 85-104.

10. Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman, "The Rabbi as Ethnic Broker: The Case of David Marx," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2 (Spring 1983): 51-68; Mark K. Bauman, "Role Theory and History: The Illustration of Ethnic Brokerage in the Atlanta Jewish Community in an Era of Transition and Conflict," *American Jewish History* 73 (September 1983): 71-96; Mark K. Bauman, "Harry Hyman Epstein and the Rabbinate As the Conduit for Change" (unpublished paper, Atlanta Metropolitan College).

11. Bauman and Shankman, "The Rabbi As Ethnic Broker," pp. 52, 56.

daism as an American form of Judaism. These men labored individually in their local congregations and, together, among the larger community of Conservative Jews, wrestled with the forces of Americanization to carve out for themselves and their congregants a religious and ethnic identity shaped by the Jewish and American traditions. By banding together into the Rabbinical Assembly, they collectively set parameters for the maintenance of that identity within the American synagogue. These rabbis thus shaped the Rabbinical Assembly as a national clerical leader, a kind of institutional ethnic mediator guiding the more than one-third of American Jewry claimed by Conservative Judaism, as they strove to strike a balance in their lives between the culture of the past and the context of the present.

Conservative Judaism drew its ideology from nineteenth-century resistance by Jewish European leaders to the radical challenges posed by Reform Judaism's sweeping away of many of the traditions of a Judaism that had been shaped for two millenia by the scholars and pious men of the rabbinate. By the second decade of the twentieth century, Conservative leaders, cognizant of the need to reconcile tradition with modernity, had forged Conservative Judaism as a uniquely American form of Judaism.¹² By 1913, its leaders had created a superstructure of national organizations that included its seminary, rabbinical conference, and a congregational union, the United Synagogue of America. Claiming twenty-two congregational affiliates at its founding meeting, the United Synagogue grew to 220 synagogues by 1927, most of them led by men ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and members of the Rabbinical Assembly. In the post-World War II era, when all forms of religious life in America enjoyed a resurgence, Conservative Judaism grew rapidly. By 1964 its ranks numbered 778 congregations; by 1971 its membership had stabilized at some 830 synagogues, most of them led then, and now, by Seminary-trained Rabbinical Assembly rabbis whose ranks subsequently surpassed the 1200-member mark.¹³

While Conservative leaders crafted national associations to guide the men, women and children of the American synagogue, Conservative Judaism simultaneously emerged among the leading sectors of American Jewry. As Marshall Sklare demonstrated in his 1955 classic, *Conservative Judaism*, the movement developed because the majority of ac-

12. On its origins in the nineteenth century, see Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1963).

13. On the history of Conservative Judaism, see Abraham J. Karp, "A Century of Conservative Judaism in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book* vol. 86 (1986): 3-61. For institutional histories of the national associations, see Pamela S. Nadell, *Conservative Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 263-354.

culturating East European Jews in areas of the "third settlement" rejected Orthodoxy as too reminiscent of the Yiddish-speaking ghetto that they wished to leave behind, and found that German-dominated Reform demanded too great a leap across cultures. Instead, these men and women in the 1910s and 1920s built new, or modified existing, congregations as Conservative synagogues. They became westernized houses of prayer, study, and, most importantly, assembly — institutions fostering Jewish ethnicity in America.¹⁴ New patterns of mixed seating of men and women and the introduction of late Friday night services with English-language prayers and sermons, preached by Seminary-trained rabbis, set these synagogues apart both from the Orthodoxy of the past and from the gradually evolving modern Orthodoxy of the American present.¹⁵ At the same time, they distinguished themselves from Reform temples by the wearing of ritual garb (*kippah* and *talit*) during worship and the use of the traditional Hebrew liturgy at Saturday morning services. Although Sklare claimed that Conservative laity pioneered the evolution of the Conservative synagogue, Conservative rabbis, bringing to their congregations a specific vision of modern Judaism, cooperated with, and led, local congregants in establishing the Conservative synagogue in America.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, these leaders found that, to a large extent, their efforts at the local level were buttressed and strengthened by the ongoing work of the Rabbinical Assembly.

Each of the Rabbinical Assembly's chief spheres of activity reflected the determination of its men, responding to the challenges that they met in the field in their synagogue pulpits, to adapt their ancient faith to its new American environs. Their outstanding achievements as a group — the professionalization of the Conservative rabbinate, the modification of the traditional liturgy, and, especially, the continued development of the body of classical Jewish law known as *halakhah* — all grew out of efforts to reconcile the past with the present. In fact, the ideological slogan of Conservative Judaism, "tradition and change," confirms just that. The words became the title of the first anthology published by the Rabbinical Assembly.¹⁷ By "tradition", the men of the Rabbinical Assembly meant that they retained their commitment to historic Judaism — its leaders and teachers, *halakhah* and texts — in other words to the culture of the past. But they determined to allow for essential changes, to meet head-on the challenges of contemporary Amer-

14. Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, pp. 68-74; cf. Jeffrey Gurock, "A Generation Unaccounted for in American Judaism," *American Jewish History* 77 (December 1987): 247-59.

15. Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, pp. 15-82; Gurock, "A Generation;" Jack Wertheimer, "The Conservative Synagogue," in *The American Synagogue*, pp. 111-49.

16. Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, pp. 66-82. For a fuller discussion of this point, see Nadell, pp. 329-30. Cf. Deborah Dash Moore's discussion of the confluence of lay and rabbinic leadership at the Brooklyn Jewish Center: "A Synagogue Center Grows in Brooklyn," in *The American Synagogue*, pp. 297-326.

17. Mordecai Waxman, ed., *Tradition and Change* (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1958).

ican life to respond to the new context. In so doing, the Rabbinical Assembly helped fashion Conservative Judaism as a synthesis of Jewish and American traditions, preserving Jewish ethnic and religious identities by adapting Judaism to twentieth-century America. Examples from the three chief areas of Rabbinical Assembly activity — its professional concerns, its liturgical projects, and its development of halakhah — will serve to illustrate the kinds of accommodations that the rabbis effected to develop Conservative Judaism within the American setting. As each reveals, by striking a balance between culture and context, between the past and the present, between tradition and change, the Rabbinical Assembly functioned as an ethnic leader guiding Conservative Jews and their rabbis to understand how they could be both Jewish and American at the same time.

On the eve of the founding of the Alumni Association of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, those entering the rabbinate anticipated that their congregants expected them to be “jacks of all Jewish trades” — rabbis, teachers, preachers, cantors, synagogue administrators, and Sunday School principals — poorly paid for their efforts and always at the mercy of the lay leaders of their congregations. With rabbinical contracts rarely running more than a year or two, job insecurity was a serious problem. Rabbis sensed that the often frustrating contractual negotiations with their congregants were always just around the corner. Fear that they might soon have to pull up stakes and uproot their families hindered them from undertaking important long-range projects. They worried about what would happen if they became ill; how their families would manage when they died. Most of all, the undignified, competitive scramble for the few pulpits open to Seminary graduates demeaned everyone involved.¹⁸

Perhaps no single issue better illustrates the Americanization of the rabbinate, its adaptation to the contemporary context, than the transformation of the Rabbinical Assembly from an alumni organization into a professional association — in essence a “trade union” — strong enough to ameliorate the precariousness of the American rabbinate. As it fought for, and, over time, won, material benefits for its men — health insurance, pensions, sabbaticals, and substantial salaries — the Rabbinical Assembly showed that the contemporary environment not only influenced the substance of the synagogue — its worship, its schools, and its social activities — but that it equally shaped the rabbinate as livelihood.¹⁹

18. Naomi Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), pp. 190-94; *United Synagogue Recorder* 3, 4 (Oct. 1923): 2; *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America 1927* (PRA), vol. 1, p. 21.

19. Wolfe Kelman used the term, “trade union;” “Report of Executive Vice-President,” *PRA 1960* vol. 24, p. 72. See also Robert Gordis, “The Rabbinical Assembly and Conservative Judaism: Retrospect and Prospect,” *PRA 1965* vol. 29, pp. 88-89.

One of the cornerstones of this transformation was the revolution in the system of rabbinic placement. The Rabbinical Assembly's determination to seize control of rabbinic placement brought it squarely against the weight of Jewish tradition and posed one of the greatest challenges of its early years.²⁰ In the past, both in law and in theory, a Jewish community was free to choose its rabbi and to change him at will. Any rabbi could apply for any position. But, surprisingly, that egalitarian notion contravened American values, which promised rewards for experience and seniority and which deemed it unsporting for men to vie for jobs where the incumbent had not announced his intention to resign. The solution, after decades of trial and error, came as the Rabbinical Assembly, in partnership with the Seminary, created the Joint Placement Commission. To the delight of many and to the dismay of some, by the late 1940s it had succeeded in regulating the field of rabbinic placements for the entire Conservative movement.

Led by the Rabbinical Assembly's first full-time executive personnel — another sign of its emergence as a professional association — Bernard Segal (1945-49), Max Routtenberg (1949-51), Wolfe Kelman (1951-89), and Joel Meyers (1989-) — the Joint Placement Commission became responsible for the successful orchestration and standardization of the procedures of matching Conservative congregations with Conservative rabbis. Its rules and regulations strove to dignify rabbinic placement, prohibiting rabbis from applying on their own for jobs. Instead, rabbis seeking new posts would, in confidence, contact the Commission. The Commission, and only the Commission, then had the authority to recommend a candidate to a congregation seeking a new rabbi. In so doing, it considered both the seniority of applicants and the rewards of a particular congregation's size, location, and financial package. Ultimately, the Rabbinical Assembly's control over rabbinic placement became so powerful that it was able to exert discipline among its ranks; those who violated its placement procedures were subject to expulsion.²¹

Clearly, the Rabbinical Assembly emulated American trade unions and professional associations in creating its procedures for rabbinic placement. And just as clearly, this transformation contravened the weight of the traditional experiences of the past. Conservative leaders were not unaware of how these changes brought them to mediate be-

20. *Jewish Exponent* (14 July 1911): 8ff.; Louis Epstein, "The Rabbinical Assembly: A Partner in the Campaign," *United Synagogue Recorder* 3, 4 (October 1923): 13.

21. See among others, Max Davidson, "Report of the Placement Committee," *PRA* 1946 vol. 10, pp. 316-17; Max Davidson, "Report of the Placement Commission," *PRA* 1947 vol. 11, pp. 94-97; Jacob Bosniak, "Report of the Placement Evaluation Committee," *PRA* 1952 vol. 16, pp. 80-86; Judah Nadich, "Placement Procedures and Salary Negotiations," *PRA* 1980 vol. 42, pp. 260-67; Simon Greenberg, "The Jewish Theological Seminary of America," *PRA* 1960 vol. 24, p. 150; Ira Eisenstein, "President's Message," *PRA* 1953 vol. 17, p. 140.

tween tradition and change in the American context. Former Rabbinical Assembly president Simon Greenberg commented:

The Rabbinical Assembly, in creating its Placement Commission and in instituting its present procedures, and our congregations in submitting by and large to these procedures, have set new precedents in Jewish history. It has made itself an almost indispensable intermediary between the rabbi and the congregation.²²

But these achievements of the Rabbinical Assembly also serve to reveal the underlying tensions that resulted from the process of adaptation. A survey of its membership in 1970 found the not unusual, yet nevertheless high, figure of thirty percent of its men critical of its work. Part of the dissatisfaction stemmed from an inherent paradox in the nature of the Conservative rabbinate. Conservative rabbis, thanks in large measure to the pioneering achievements of the Rabbinical Assembly, are relatively well-rewarded, paid professionals. Nevertheless, the rabbis prefer to think of themselves not as salaried professionals but as devoted to a calling, the heirs to the traditional East European rabbis whose piety, learning, and spirituality they continue, largely, to idealize. Consequently, these rabbis walk a fine line between their self-image as salaried professionals — an image born out of the contemporary context — entitled to the material rewards of their positions, and their self-image as men of calling, spiritual leaders of their congregants. This was especially true for the first generations of Conservative rabbis, the majority of whom were either born in Eastern Europe or the sons of those who were, and who found the concept of the rabbinate, as career, equivalent to being a doctor or a lawyer, somewhat incongruous. With difficulty they asked — or wished the Placement Commission to ask — their congregations to provide health and disability insurance, pay the entire annual premium on their retirement funds, supply rent-free housing and repair their parsonages, reimburse them for convention expenses, and award tenure. But, as spiritual leaders, they often felt demeaned by the process of negotiating for these worldly necessities. The impossibility of reconciling the incongruous self-images of an American paid professional with that of the historic Jewish rabbinical scholar, reveals the discomforts so often observed of those who were ethnic leaders. And it also demonstrates the limitations that these men faced in trying to resolve all of the tensions associated with assimilating to the new context.²³

The second major area of Rabbinical Assembly activity, illustrative of the process of accommodation, was its liturgical work. The idea of

22. Simon Greenberg, "The Role of the Rabbinical Assembly," *PRA* 1955 vol. 19, p. 146.

23. Harry Gersh, "The Survey on Rabbinic Status," *Beineinu* 2, 1 (January 1972); Gilbert Kollin, "Placement," *Beineinu* 1, 2 (January 1971): 3-8. Cf. Greene on the "trying personal conditions" and discomfort of ethnic leaders, in *American Immigrant Leaders*, pp. 8, 11.

publishing prayer books for use in the synagogues led by the alumni of the Jewish Theological Seminary, had its origins in the early twentieth century. But, until 1946, only one prayer book bearing the imprimatur of the Conservative movement had appeared. By 1940, the Rabbinical Assembly had already become convinced that one of its chief responsibilities was to direct the future development of Conservative Judaism by compiling, editing, translating, and creating prayer books for use in its synagogues. It charged the members of its Prayer Book Commission to research religious ideology, formulate appropriate new prayers, arrange the service, and publish a prayer book “*in keeping with the desired practice of the majority of [its] congregations*” [original emphasis].²⁴

The members of the Prayer Book Commission — chairman Robert Gordis, editor Morris Silverman, and their fellow rabbis, Max Arzt, Simon Greenberg, Jacob Kohn, Israel Levinthal, Louis Levitsky, Abraham A. Neuman, and Elias Solomon, all worked long and hard to revise the manuscript originally submitted by Silverman. The publication, in 1946, of the *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of America was the result of their united efforts. The *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* — commonly called the “Silverman Prayer Book” — retained Conservatism’s historic commitment to Jewish tradition; the Hebrew liturgy was left virtually unchanged. But with English translations, “A Prayer for Our Country,” and all the verses of “America the Beautiful” (still sung, incidentally, from this prayer book on Labor Day, 1988 in the largest Conservative congregation in the nation’s capitol), it clearly reflected the American context.²⁵ As its liturgy blended the traditional Hebrew text with English language and American patriotism, it affirmed the Rabbinical Assembly’s vision of Conservative Judaism as a blend of two cultures, the historic Judaism of the past transplanted to a twentieth-century American setting. And its rapid and widespread acceptance revealed the willingness of the movement’s congregants to honor their leaders’ synthesis. By 1949, over 300 of the 365 congregations of the Conservative movement had adopted it, making it a hallmark of the Conservative synagogue and one of the lasting achievements of the Rabbinical Assembly in its role as ethnic mediator.²⁶

Yet, the publication of the *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* also revealed the tensions associated with mediating between tradition and

24. Leon Lang, “The President’s Message,” *PRA* 1941 vol. 8, p. 15.

25. Rabbinical Assembly of America and United Synagogue of America, *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, eds. Robert Gordis, Morris Silverman, *et al.* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly of America and United Synagogue of America, 1946).

26. *Conservative Judaism* 5, 1-2 (Oct.-Jan., 1948-49), back cover. Cf. Marshall Sklare’s observation of “the emergence of a sense of constituting a movement — a sense of a shared Conservatism on the part of the Conservative laity” during the 1950s and 1960s; Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, p.260.

change. Some vehemently objected to what others considered to be all too minimal emendations of the classical Hebrew text. One member of the original Prayer Book Commission, Milton Steinberg, resigned in protest over the timidity of its changes. Another prominent Conservative rabbi, Ben Zion Bokser, published, in 1957, his own Sabbath and Festival prayer book, to offer his congregants and other like-minded Conservative Jews the opportunity to retain the classical liturgy. But he, too, had to allow for modern sensibilities, by revising the prayer in which men traditionally thank God for not making them women, and by reinterpreting many of the prayers in his translations.²⁷ Thus, all the members of the Prayer Book Commission, including Steinberg and Bokser, agreed upon the role that the rabbi played as ethnic mediator in creating contemporary prayer books. Where they disagreed strongly was in their visions of the proper balance which those prayer books were to maintain between the past and the present.

While other Conservative rabbis, including Silverman and Sidney Greenberg, have since then published new prayer books for a variety of services, the Rabbinical Assembly, primarily under the editorship of its director of publications, Rabbi Jules Harlow, has also continued to assert its right to lead the movement in liturgical creativity. Finding the translations and the tone of the old "Silverman Prayer Book" dated and unappealing to contemporary Jews, Harlow embarked upon his most ambitious project, eleven years in the making, the publication of *Siddur Sim Shalom* (1985), the first comprehensive Conservative prayer book combining weekday, Sabbath, and festival services in a single volume.²⁸ In it, he wove together traditional and contemporary sources of Jewish creativity, blending the past and the present. But his particular concerns — not evident in the old *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* — for the participation of women, remembrance of the Holocaust, and connection to the modern State of Israel, demonstrated the on-going mediation between the historic traditions of the past and the realities of the present.

Yet, once again, the difficulty of this task is apparent. Five years after its publication, *Siddur Sim Shalom* is used in but six of the thirteen Conservative congregations surveyed in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Six congregations continue to use either Silverman or another prayer book, and one, inadvertently illustrating how very precarious the balance between the past and the present is, uses Silverman for some of its services and *Siddur Sim Shalom* for others.²⁹ The Rab-

27. Ben Zion Bokser, ed. and trans., *The Prayer Book: Weekday, Sabbath, and Festival* (New York: Behrman, 1957).

28. Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly of America, 1985).

29. Author's telephone survey, 17 January 1990.

binical Assembly's most recent effort to assert its leadership as an ethnic mediator in the field of liturgy has thus far met with a mixed reception.

If *Siddur Sim Shalom* has yet to win the acceptance that the Conservative movement once accorded to the "Silverman prayer book," another and more recent document issued by Conservative leaders has been more enthusiastically embraced. In 1988, Conservative leaders, under the imprint of all of the movement's national professional and lay associations, proclaimed, in *Emet ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*, their vision of the ideal Conservative Jew. He and she affirm "faith in God as the Creator and Governor of the universe;" recognize the authority of a developing halakhah; appreciate Jewish pluralism, the richness of Jewish literature, and the centrality of ethics in Jewish teachings; understand the essential role of Israel in the Jewish past, present, and future; and value Jewish law and tradition.³⁰ Hailed by Conservative rabbis as the long-needed philosophical statement which would explain the movement to its laity, *Emet ve-Emunah* was, in some congregations, given to every member. In almost every Conservative setting, and even in some places outside the movement, it became the subject of sermons and adult education classes.

Emet ve-Emunah built upon the groundwork that prominent rabbis, like the men of the 1940s Prayer Book Commission, had laid over the course of the century as local ethnic leaders. The members of the Prayer Book Commission all were, or had been, congregational rabbis, leaders long experienced in mediating between culture and context in their congregations and local communities. It was there, in their sanctuaries and classrooms, that they first brought into focus and broadcast what it meant to be a Jew at home in America. In their synagogues they tried to show their congregants that their Jewish identities were not incompatible with their American ones. But these men had not limited themselves to guiding their congregants to fix the boundaries of their Jewish identities. Instead, they tried to extend the sway of their influence to persuade all Conservative Jews to accept their synthesis of American and Jewish values. A brief survey of some of the educational and liturgical activities of the nine members of the Prayer Book Commission — six of whom were Rabbinical Assembly presidents — will illustrate how, decades before *Emet ve-Emunah*, they had helped craft the model Conservative Jew that it portrayed.

In the East European past of the vast majority of their congregants, "A Jew without learning [was] incomplete."³¹ If Jews were to remain

30. Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of America, Women's League for Conservative Judaism, Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, *Emet ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (n.p.: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of America, 1988), esp. pp. 14-16.

31. Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl*

Jews in the American present, Jewish learning, Conservative rabbis were convinced, must remain a central value. As *Emet ve-Emunah* stated:

Virtually alone among all religious traditions, Judaism regards study as a cardinal commandment, the highest form of the worship of God. *Talmud Torah* is the obligation and the privilege of every Jew, male and female, young and old, no matter how much or how little one knows at present.³²

But, in the past, boys learned Talmud in the *heder* and yeshivah and girls were apprenticed to their mothers' kitchens. Accommodating to America meant radical changes not only in the ways in which Jewish education was acquired and the subjects taught, but it also meant opening it up to girls and women. The educational activities of the rabbis of the Prayer Book Commission reveal their awareness of this. As they built institutions and created programs to convey the Jewish heritage of the past, they did so sharply cognizant of the American present.

Prayer Book Commission Chairman, Rabbi Robert Gordis, who also headed the Commission on the Philosophy of Conservative Judaism which produced *Emet ve-Emunah*, was rabbi of Temple Beth El, Rockaway Park, New York. There, in 1950, he founded one of the first Conservative Jewish day schools. By 1987 the movement claimed sixty-nine Solomon Schechter Day Schools, including seven high schools.³³ They had become Conservative Judaism's most intensive educational institutions for imparting to the next generation the Jewish knowledge that is essential to leading a full Jewish life in America. When he was rabbi of Philadelphia's Har Zion Temple, Simon Greenberg had helped organize a nursery and kindergarten, so that even his youngest congregants could begin their Jewish education. Later, his *Harishon* Hebrew textbooks shaped the educational experiences of an entire generation of children in Conservative afternoon Hebrew schools. At Temple Israel in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Rabbi Louis Levitsky ran a host of adult education programs, including a Women's Institute. He extended his domain as a leading figure in adult Jewish education when he became director of the Jewish Theological Seminary's School of Jewish Studies and Women's Institute. To enable Conservative Jews to fulfill one of the cardinal tenets of Jewish life, these rabbis and others crafted the foundations of Conservative Jewish education. But, true to the modern context, they founded Americanized schools — kindergartens, supplementary schools, day schools, and adult education classrooms — not the talmud torah and the yeshivah of the Jewish past. And, in the spirit of modern Jewish learning, they took for their curricula all of the rich

(New York: Schocken, 1952), p. 80.

32. Jewish Theological Seminary, *et al.*, *Emet ve-Emunah*, p. 53.

33. For biographical sketches of Gordis and the other members of the Prayer Book Commission, see the relevant entries in Nadell, *Conservative Judaism in America*. Figures cited in United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, "Solomon Schechter Day School Association Student Enrollment Survey, 1985-87" (mimeo).

resources of Judaica — including modern Hebrew literature, the history of Zionism, and even Hebrew for tourists — not just the rabbinics taught in the East European world that is no more.

Yet, once again, while these rabbis tried to figure out how best to help create the institutions and programs needed to produce Jewishly-knowledgeable Jews, they came up, time and again, against the reality that what they wanted for their congregants — a comprehensive Jewish education — was not always what these American Jews wanted for themselves. While education remains a central theme of the Conservative synagogue today, and while many can boast strong programs of adult education attended by a devoted segment of their members, most have seen their supplementary school programs, once ten to eleven hours a week, fall dramatically to six or even fewer hours. Plagued by too few hours in which to prepare children to become the educated Jews of the future that the rabbis want, these schools have, all too often, become the breeding grounds of discontent. The rote learning needed to master prayer, holiday, and Shabbat skills, bores uninterested students and upsets their parents. Those interested in intensive Jewish education, too few thus far, turn to the day schools. The rest — some seventy-five percent of the Jewish children in the United States who receive any Jewish education — come to see the supplementary schools as places whence they must flee as soon as they have reaped the reward of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Similarly, finding qualified teachers and principals has become exceedingly difficult. Those dedicated to Jewish education, who want the status and economic benefits of its profession, are in the day schools.³⁴ Once again, then, the rabbis, who must champion their schools if they are to continue to see themselves as fosterers of Jewish education, confront the tensions generated by their roles as mediators between two cultures.

Others of the rabbis who had been members of the 1940s Prayer Book Commission labored to lead their fellow Jews to return to the tradition of communal prayer.³⁵ First and foremost, that meant worship in synagogues they could be proud of, not in the small *shuls* that their parents attended in immigrant neighborhoods. For Rabbi Israel Levinthal this meant the spiritual leadership of the prototypical American synagogue-center, the Brooklyn Jewish Center. Embracing 1,000 families in the mid-1920s, it housed a school and a pool, a kosher kitchen and a gymnasium, offices and a two-story house of worship. For Commission members Elias Solomon, rabbi of New York City's Congregation Shaare Zedek, and Abraham A. Neuman, president of Philadelphia's Dropsie College and also a pulpit rabbi, this meant working to raise the funds to build the Jeshurun Synagogue in Jerusalem.

34. Barry Chazan, "Education in the Synagogue: The Transformation of the Supplementary School," in *The American Synagogue*, pp. 170-84.

35. Cf., Jewish Theological Seminary, et al., *Emet ve-Emunah*, pp. 49-50.

But magnificent synagogues were of little consolation to rabbis if their sanctuaries remained empty. The rabbis of the Prayer Book Commission were pragmatic American realists. They did not expect their followers to re-embrace the tradition of prayer three times a day. Still, they hoped that Jews would make their way to the synagogue on Shabbat and holidays. But they knew that Hebraically illiterate American Jews were unlikely to enter a service which they could not comprehend. Even of those who could read the words, few knew what they were praying. But for Conservative rabbis — unlike for their Reform colleagues — Hebrew as the language of the Jewish people and of prayer had to remain at the heart of Jewish identity. Because prayer books had evolved in the past, they reasoned — unlike their Orthodox colleagues — that they could certainly be adapted to the American present. The result, long before they joined together in the Prayer Book Commission, was individual experimentation with new liturgies.

In 1920, Israel Levinthal, along with Rabbi Israel Goldfarb, edited *Songs and Praise for Sabbath Eve*. If late working hours prevented Jews from coming to the traditional service at sunset on Friday, perhaps a late Friday evening service, complete with English readings and prayers, would draw them. Even the Hebrew text could be amended to be consonant with modern life. Commission member Jacob Kohn, rabbi of Sinai Temple, Los Angeles, had been co-editor of the *Festival Prayer Book* published by the United Synagogue of America in 1927. One of its two editions, which he had championed, allowed for minor emendations of the Hebrew liturgy out of concern for modern sensibilities. Prayer Book Commission Editor Morris Silverman, rabbi of Emanuel Synagogue, Hartford, Connecticut, was even more ambitious. In 1933 he founded Prayer Book Press to publish liturgies with English translations and readings for every service, for worshippers of all ages. Still, translations were not enough, really, to guide a Jew through the service. Max Arzt, who had led congregations in Stamford and Scranton, and had then gone on, among Conservative Jews, to raise both funds and consciousness for the Jewish Theological Seminary, wrote commentaries on the High Holiday and Sabbath liturgies.³⁶ Individually, these men tried to insure that communal prayer, albeit in a “*shul mit a pool*,” would remain an integral part of Jewish identity.

These highlights touch upon only two particular spheres, education and worship, in which the rabbis of the Prayer Book Commission, as individuals, brokered between the past and the present for themselves,

36. Israel Goldfarb and Israel H. Levinthal, eds., *Songs and Praise for Sabbath Eve* (New York: n.p., 1920); United Synagogue of America, *Festival Prayer Book* (New York: United Synagogue of America, 1927); Max Arzt, *Justice and Mercy: Commentary on the Liturgy of the New Year and the Day of Atonement* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963); Max Arzt, *Joy and Remembrance: Commentary on the Sabbath Eve Liturgy* (New York: Hartmore House, 1979).

for their congregants, and for the larger body of Conservative Jewry. In essence, they spent their lives mediating between tradition and change in order to strike a balance that would enable Conservative and — so they hoped — all American Jews to preserve their religious and ethnic identities.

While the content of worship belongs to the sphere of “religious,” learning Hebrew for tourists, studying Jewish history, and the lavish celebrations following Bar Mitzvah services seem to transcend the sphere of “religious,” to be indicative of “ethnicity.” In teaching the language that Jews use in prayer and on the streets of Tel Aviv, in discussing the archaeology of the Bible and the short stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer, and in leading the family and friends of the Bat Mitzvah girl in “*siman tov u’mazal tov*,” these rabbis were not simply religious leaders but also ethnic ones. Their words and deeds show them striving to bind Jews ever more tightly to their people and its historical memory and language, ritual observances, and ethical teachings. Paired with the other activities which brought Jews to the synagogues which these rabbis led — the multitude of weddings at which they officiated, the Sisterhood variety shows and other functions which raised funds for the school, and the endless meetings in synagogue libraries, classrooms, and rabbis’ offices — they reveal the rabbis to be ethnic leaders deeply concerned with the basic issues confronting all American ethnic groups. Efforts to foster Jewish education, to maintain group identity and, both individually and collectively as members of the Prayer Book Commission, to Americanize Jewish worship in order to set Judaism comfortably within the contemporary context, reveal the rabbis striving always to guide Jews to remain Jews by teaching them how to be Jewish and American at the same time.

The last major area of activity illustrative of the Rabbinical Assembly as ethnic mediator, was its effort to interpret and, when necessary, to adapt the body of Jewish law and tradition, known as *halakhah*, to the unique circumstances of contemporary America. As the ideological heir to Zacharias Frankel’s notion of “Positive-Historical Judaism,” Conservative Judaism retained its commitment to the observance of Jewish law. Frankel, a champion of moderate religious reform during his years as chief rabbi of Saxony (1836-1854) and, subsequently, the founding director of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau (1854-1875), has been claimed by Conservative leaders, seeking the legitimacy of a European antecedent, as a founding father of their movement.³⁷ As Conservative Judaism’s premier historian, Abraham J. Karp, observed, Conservative Judaism developed as a “product of both the ideological ferment in nineteenth-century Jewish life and the sociological realities

37. Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, discusses the ideological connection, esp. pp. 13, 139; On Frankel, see Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 84-89.

of twentieth-century America.”³⁸ While it is scarcely likely that the American Jews who founded Conservative synagogues knew of Frankel, his writings did set the ideological context for the subsequent development of the movement.

As a moderate reformer, Frankel insisted that Jews accept on faith the continuity of Jewish law. While the laws of the Pentateuch had been divinely revealed, he did recognize that the evolving body of rabbinic legislation — which came to regulate every aspect of the daily life and life cycle of the Jewish people — reflected changing historical circumstances. Continuity with Jewish law had to be maintained, although dynamism, rather than stasis, guided by proper authorities, should make halakhah flexible in the new context. Conservative Judaism thus emerged as an halakhic movement.

But its adherence to halakhah was sharply at odds with what its leaders saw all around them. During the course of the twentieth century, as Americanization and secularization made ever greater inroads, American Jews fashioned their own Jewish tradition, picking and choosing within halakhah, observing certain holidays meticulously and others less so, upholding certain rites and rituals, inventing new ones like Bat Mizvah, Simḥat Bat, and adult Bat Mizvah; and, to a great extent, ignoring others like *Tisha B'Av*. Yet this halakhic chaos seriously undermined the tradition upheld by Conservative rabbis. For them, acceptance of the “yoke of the Law” was at the heart of Jewish existence. Modernizing Jews, abandoning halakhah in their rush to embrace the New World and its ways, threatened to deal a death blow to that tradition. As Seminary Professor Louis Ginzberg, the revered Talmud teacher of the first generations of the Conservative rabbinate, explained:

It is certainly one of the most grievous misfortunes of modern Judaism, that the cobbler will not stick to his last and will imagine himself able to judge all things in heaven and earth. . . . [W]e must be guided in questions of law and doctrine by those who know. Judaism never taught that “ignorance is bliss” or that “the majority cannot be wrong.” The conception that in religious matters anyone, however ignorant, can judge for himself, is the direct denial of the old Jewish maxim, “The ignorant cannot be pious.”³⁹

The solution, Conservative rabbis believed, was for them to take charge of shaping halakhah, striking a balance between the forces of “tradition and change” so that Conservative Jews could, and would, volunteer to observe it. The men of the Rabbinical Assembly believed that if they could show that Jewish law was sufficiently flexible to respond to the changed conditions of life in the contemporary world, they would succeed in laying the foundations for American Jews’ ad-

38. Karp, “A Century of Conservative Judaism in the United States,” p. 3.

39. Louis Ginzberg, *Presidential Address to the United Synagogue of America* (New York: United Synagogue of America, 1918).

herence to halakhah. Their triumphs and disappointments in adjusting halakhah led former Rabbinical Assembly President, Max Routtenberg, to claim: "The problem of Jewish law and its applicability to life remains the 'grand obsession' of the Rabbinical Assembly."⁴⁰

To take care of the "sorting, distributing, selecting, harmonizing, and completing" of the great tradition that contemporary Jewry inherited from the past, the Conservative movement established a series of committees on Jewish law: the Committee for the Interpretation of Jewish Law (1917-27), Committee on Jewish Law (1927-47), and the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (1948-).⁴¹ Because it is the inherent nature of halakhah to regulate every aspect of the Jewish way of life, not just the religious sphere, the Conservative rabbis set for themselves the task of accommodating halakhah to America. From the past they preserved loyalty to halakhah and the maintenance of the rabbinical prerogative of reinterpretation. But, true to the present, they took for their agenda the key issues raised by modern American life.

Three areas, among the literally thousands of decisions made by the committees on Jewish law, will illustrate how Conservative rabbis strove to mediate between the weight of tradition and the realities of contemporary life. For them, twentieth-century technology and geography called for halakhic modifications of certain laws of Sabbath observance. The migration to the suburbs and the distance that Jews lived from their synagogues mandated — for Conservative if not for Orthodox Jews — a rethinking of the traditional prohibition against travel, other than by foot, on the Sabbath. In 1932, the Committee on Jewish Law had failed to lift the ban against riding in an automobile on the day of rest. By 1950, however, suburban sprawl increasingly discouraged Conservative Jews from attending communal worship unless they drove to synagogue. Conservative rabbis faced the dilemma of either finding a way to permit their congregants to ride to synagogue on the Sabbath, or seeing Conservative Jews skipping services altogether. Having "learn[ed] to adjust our strategy to the realities of our time and place," the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, in a 1950 *responsum* [a legal opinion] jointly authored by pulpit rabbis Morris Adler, Jacob Agus, and Theodore Friedman, lifted the traditional prohibition against travel on the Sabbath solely for the purpose of riding to the synagogue to join in communal worship.⁴²

In so doing, the rabbis thought that they were striking a blow to preserve ethnic identity. Looking about them in 1950, they saw

40. Max Routtenberg, "The Conservative Rabbinate" (1960); reprinted in his *Decades of Decision* (New York: Bloch, 1973), p. 149.

41. Ginzberg, *Presidential Address*.

42. "Report of the Committee on Jewish Law," *PRA* 1932 vol. 4., p. 236; Morris Adler, Jacob Agus, and Theodore Friedman, "Responsum on the Sabbath," *PRA* 1950 vol. 14, p. 125.

the gradual elimination and disappearance of all forms of Sabbath observance . . . a trend best described as a descending spiral. Unless halted and reversed, it will soon reach an absolute nadir and the single greatest Jewish religious institution will have passed out of the lives of the great mass of the members of our congregations.

To counter what they saw as “a situation without parallel in the long annals of Judaism,” they devised a program to “reintroduce into the lives of our people as much Sabbath observance and spirit as we may reasonably hope our people will, with proper education, accept.” It called, in part, for ushering in Shabbat in the home, refraining from activities like shopping and exercise that were not in keeping with the spirit of Shabbat, and spending part of the day reading sacred literature. Because Shabbat observance required attendance at public worship, driving to shul by families residing beyond a walking distance would be “an expression of loyalty to our faith.”⁴³ To the Conservative rabbis, the *heter* (permission) to drive to services on Shabbat was a way of preserving group identity appropriate to their time and place. But the decision inadvertently endorsed the demographic assimilation of American Jewry by sanctioning their living largely scattered among Gentile neighbors, far from their synagogues, and often lacking the infrastructure necessary to an observant, ethnically cohesive, Jewish community. It is only with hindsight, in looking at the vibrant suburban communities that Orthodox Jews have determinedly built within walking distance of their synagogues, that what Conservative rabbis conceived, in 1950, as a well-calculated halakhic adjustment designed to preserve ethnic solidarity, can be seen, in fact, to have had, all too often, larger anti-ethnic implications.

Another area requiring halakhic adjustment — Conservative Judaism’s attitude towards the intermarried and their children — reveals efforts to deal with the sociological, not the geographical, realities of American Jewish life. The current rate of intermarriage for American Jews is hotly debated; in Washington, D.C. in 1983, 21.5 percent of Jews under the age of thirty-five were intermarried.⁴⁴ Whatever the real rate of intermarriage for American Jewry, Conservative synagogues have for decades struggled with the long-standing, and always sensitive, subject of congregational relations with intermarried couples. For many years the movement opposed synagogue membership for these families. In 1982, however, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, recognizing that Jewish law called for efforts “to save for Judaism even the marginal members of [the] people and their descendants,” amplified an earlier decision allowing for some integration of these families into the synagogue. The Jewish spouse could join a synagogue, and, in the hope of eventually converting the non-Jewish partner, the Committee

43. Morris Adler, *et al.*, “Responsum on the Sabbath,” pp. 120-23.

44. Figure cited by Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People*, p. 293.

encouraged synagogues to welcome the Gentile spouse to join in educational and social events. If the couple agreed to raise the children as Jews, the children could participate fully in synagogue life. But because Jewish law has traditionally recognized that the child of a Jewish mother is Jewish, children of intermarried couples whose mothers are not Jewish would have to undergo conversion prior to Bar or Bat Mitzvah.⁴⁵

Finally, the very real changes in the status of American women forced Conservative leaders to, in effect, emancipate women in the synagogue. Jewish women's participation in the pre-modern synagogue confined them to a balcony, or seating behind a curtain or other separation (*meḥizah*), where they would not distract men from their sacred task. But modernity and Americanization meant that women would not be so marginal in the emerging Conservative synagogue. The result was the growing inclusion of women in synagogue activities on a secular and religious level, a development encouraged by Conservative leaders. When Seminary President Solomon Schechter addressed the founding meeting of the United Synagogue of America in 1913, he called upon it to "assign a certain portion of its work to women and give them a regular share in its activities."⁴⁶ In 1918, his widow, and, as Mel Scult has shown, his silent editor, Mathilde Roth Schechter, organized twenty-six congregational sisterhoods into the National Women's League of the United Synagogue of America, today the Women's League for Conservative Judaism. But while the creation of synagogue sisterhoods sharply reflected the realities of middle-class women's leisure and useful occupation in the American setting, their establishment did not force Conservative leaders to change traditional Jewish practice.⁴⁷

Ultimately, however, demands for change in women's status in the synagogue service forced Conservative leaders — sometimes responding to the call from below and other times initiating it from above — to make radical breaks with the traditional exclusion of women from the forefront of synagogue life. Over the course of the twentieth century, local Conservative rabbis, sometimes facing great opposition that, on more than one occasion, took them into U.S. civil courts, allowed for men and women to sit together in worship.⁴⁸ Determined to extend women's participation in the synagogue service, the rabbis reinterpreted

45. Jacob Agus, *et al.*, "The Mitzvah of *Keruv*: Papers from the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards," *Conservative Judaism* 35, 4 (Summer 1982): 33-62.

46. Solomon Schechter, "The Work of Heaven: An Address" (1913); reprinted in *Tradition and Change*, pp. 163-72.

47. Mel Scult, "The *Baale Boste* Reconsidered: The Life of Mathilde Roth Schechter (M.R.S.)," *Modern Judaism* 7, 1 (February 1987): 1-27; Jenna Weissman Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman: The Synagogue Sisterhood," in *The American Synagogue*, pp. 206-230.

48. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Debate over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue," *The American Synagogue*, pp. 363-94.

Jewish law to allow for women to be called to the Torah (*aliyah*, 1955), to have a Bat Mizvah, to be counted in a prayer quorum (*minyan*, 1973), and to be ordained as rabbis (1983) and cantors (1987).⁴⁹ Despite the marshalling of evidence in *responsa* arguing that the changes did not contravene halakhah, they did constitute radical breaks with the past. In the immediate past of the immigrant parents and grandparents of Conservative Jews, women simply did not play these roles in the synagogue. Here, in America, they now did.

By allowing for driving to the synagogue on the Sabbath, some acceptance of intermarrieds in the synagogue, and women's religious participation, Conservative rabbis demonstrated the paradox of the ethnic broker, trying curiously to preserve ethnic identity by advocating dramatic and sweeping change. The leaders of the Rabbinical Assembly sensed that their synagogues were doomed if they did not move to locate them in the American context. Yet, as they attempted to broker between past and present to preserve as much as possible the integrity of the group, Conservative leaders found themselves advocating and accepting extraordinarily wide-sweeping changes. Driving to the synagogue on Shabbat, the inclusion of intermarried families in synagogue life, and the opening of the synagogue to women's participation and religious leadership, were, in truth, dramatic breaks with the continuity of the past.

And, like all other attempts at ethnic mediation, they engendered extraordinary tension for the Rabbinical Assembly. "Considering how far removed [top Conservative leaders were] from our concept of halakhic process," several Conservative rabbis founded, in 1984, the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism.⁵⁰ While remaining, for the moment, within the larger movement, this separatist organization supports its own law committee and publications to disseminate its view of the proper balance between the tradition of the past and the America of the present. Meanwhile, Conservative rabbis, as a whole, remain plagued by the cognitive dissonance that they confront in the extraordinary gap between the halakhic conformance displayed in the public settings of Conservative Judaism which they control and the limited observance that they know the majority of their congregants evidence in their personal lives.

49. Among the relevant *responsa* are Aaron H. Blumenthal, "An *Aliyah* for Women" (1955), and "The Status of Women in Jewish Law" (1977), reprinted in *And Bring Them Closer to Torah: The Life and Work of Rabbi Aaron H. Blumenthal*, ed. David R. Blumenthal (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1986), pp. 11-42; *The Ordination of Women as Rabbis: Studies and Responsa*, ed. Simon Greenberg (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1988). Conservative Judaism allows for diversity of opinion. Because each local rabbi is the ultimate authority for his congregation, these changes predominate within the movement, though they may not be accepted throughout the movement.

50. Letter from the Steering Committee of the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism to Colleagues, 31 March 1985.

Despite the tensions, the halakhic changes which they deemed essential to the contemporary context can be viewed as courageous responses by the men of the Rabbinical Assembly. As Max Routtenberg claimed, [thus] "one of the great and influential rabbinic organizations of all time . . . has touched and influenced every phase and every aspect of developing Jewish life on the American scene."⁵¹ This suggests that the Rabbinical Assembly saw itself as an ethnic mediator. No facet of Jewish life in America, inside and outside of the synagogue, was beyond its purview. And its first generations of leaders, men, many — like six of the nine members of the Prayer Book Commission — born in Europe but living in America, believed that their particular interpretation of Judaism was especially suited to guide the shaping of an American Jewish identity. Recognizing that each of the denominations of American Judaism claims authenticity, Rabbinical Assembly President Stanley Rabinowitz (ignoring the Reconstructionists) summarized thus:

In responding to a challenging question, it is the Orthodox mode to frame its response after asking, "Let us see what the halakhah says." It is the Reform mode to ask: "What best expresses the universal prophetic message of Judaism?" And the Conservative school ponders thus: "What will best contribute to the creative survival of the Jewish people?"⁵²

These responses — albeit defined by a Conservative leader — also suggest the differences to be found among the streams of American Jewish rabbinic leadership. Rabbis try to guide American Jews to retain the many facets of their distinctive identity — not all of which belong to the sphere of religion — within the larger society. But each denomination's vision of what makes one a Jew differs. Orthodox leaders look to the past, to tradition, shaping responses to the contemporary situation guided largely by those from another time and another place. Reform Jewish leaders isolated one central tenet from the past — ethics — and, for many years, used that, often to the exclusion of much else, as its standard for determining the content of Jewish life in the present. But Conservative rabbis were not just ethnic leaders but also ethnic brokers. As they shuttled back and forth between tradition and modernity, they took widely from both present context and traditional culture in their quest to be agents of the creative survival of the Jewish people in America. Their agenda — from embracing material concerns and rabbinic placement to English-Hebrew prayer books for Sabbath and Festivals and halakhic adjustments that allowed for driving on the Sabbath, intermarried families to join a congregation, and a female rabbi to lead it — reveal the Rabbinical Assembly to be a collective ethnic mediator, moderating between past and present, as it sought — and continues to seek — to establish successfully the parameters — at least within the Conservative community — for Jewish life in America.

51. Routtenberg, "The Conservative Rabbinate," p. 119.

52. Stanley S. Rabinowitz, "President's Address," *PRA* 1978, vol. 40, p. 11.

André Spire: Stalwart Champion of Jewish Identity and Pride

SIDNEY D. BRAUN

I

ANDRÉ SPIRE (1868-1966) IS KNOWN PRIMARILY as a French poet, and has been called by Edmond Fleg, another French Jewish poet and Spire's contemporary, "the first French Jewish poet to lay claim to his origins," and, by other writers, "France's greatest Jewish poet." In addition to his poetry, however, he reveals in his life and in his prose writings, which include essays, portraits of Jewish writers, both French and European, as well as in his dramatic poem *Samaël*,¹ a unity of thought and action, at least from the Jewish perspective. This unity emerges as a dialectic of what is clearly his strong sense of Jewishness and Jewish identity, one theme in his work that has as yet been insufficiently studied. To have a clear conception of this unity, it is important for the reader to take into account at least some of his biographical details and, more significantly, his view of life and humanity in general. The fact, too, that he loved France with all his heart, it should here be emphasized, in no way represents, as one critic suggests, a conflict between his loyalty to the country in which he was born, and his ethnic origins.² On the contrary, for him France and his Jewish heritage represented the same ideal, that of justice and authenticity of mind and heart. Where, of course, he found the application of this ideal wanting, he remonstrated, wishing to correct the sins of men and government, without at the same time altering the meaning of life itself. Viewed in its entirety, therefore, Spire's creative and critical output reflect, in the final analysis, a lyricism of conscience during his long life.

Religion itself played no role in Spire's upbringing. He was born in Nancy to a Jewish family that had been established in France for several generations before the Revolution, but which gave no importance to re-

1. With regard to Spire's works, we shall be referring frequently to his *Quelques Juifs et demi-juifs*, 2 volumes (Paris: Mercure de France, 1913). Most of the time this work will be designated by the initials of *QJ*. All of the poems that will be discussed are from the definitive edition of his *Poèmes Juifs* (1959). *Samaël*, his dramatic poem, was published by Crès in 1921.

2. This characterization, which states that he was a "curious case of French Jew torn between two cultures" is a quotation from Stanley Burnshaw in his *André Spire and His Poetry* (Philadelphia: Centaur Press, 1933), p. 53.

SIDNEY D. BRAUN is Professor emeritus of French, Graduate Center and Lehman College, C.U.N.Y.

ligious observance. It is not surprising, therefore, that Spire was not given even a minimal Jewish education. His family did, however, instill in him a constant concern for problems relating to human misery and human relationships in general. Moreover, as a youth, he had had the opportunity of seeing at first hand, thanks to his friend and fellow student René Bazin, actual examples of human misery. Influenced, too, by the affirmative ideal of life expressed by Tolstoy and others, the feeling of humanitarianism became an integral part of his life. Another important experience in his life took place in 1893, the period immediately before the Dreyfus Affair. Spire was established in Paris, where he had managed to secure his doctorate diploma, and was appointed *auditeur au Conseil d'État*, a prestigious achievement for a Jew. This event, however, caused him much anguish because of an article in print that accused him of not having obtained this post through personal merit. Disdainful as he was of personal advancement through political influence, and offended by the innuendo of anti-Semitism, he decided to correct this and other false information that appeared in the article, and wrote to its author saying that if he received no retraction, he would settle the dispute by arms. The result of this confrontation was a duel in which Spire was wounded. However, he did at least get the satisfaction of preserving the integrity of his mind. His sense of injustice was also heightened by the Dreyfus Affair, begun in 1895, and in which he was actively involved. He was also convinced, at this time, that the masses in general were being lied to and taken advantage of only because of their lack of education and their inability to evaluate critically. Therefore, together with his friend, Daniel Halévy, he founded a small popular university with the aim of remedying this situation among the working class groups. As a result of his almost obsessive preoccupation with the working class, he was later sent to London to study the English "Sweating-System," and to investigate the practice of workers' strikes. Two years later, in 1904, a spiritual revelation was to affect his entire being as a Jew. This was occasioned by the discovery of the work of an English novelist born of poor Jewish parents, whose name was Israel Zangwill.

Although it was Zangwill's *Chad Gadya* that stirred Spire's Jewish soul, it should also be stated in fairness that, two days before its appearance, he had already published an article in *Pages Libres* entitled "A Propos de Troubles Juifs à Londres" (Apropos Jewish Troubles in London), in which he had proclaimed himself in favor of Zionism.³ This article also testifies

3. Spire, because of his sense of Jewish identification and, more importantly, because of a realistic view of society, was drawn early in life to Zionism. Later, in 1918, he founded the *Ligue des Amis du Sionisme* (League of the Friends of Zionism) and the organ of that league, *La Palestine Nouvelle* (New Palestine). In 1919, he acted as liaison agent between the French government and the Zionist delegation in Paris. In 1920, he travelled to Palestine with Chaim Weizmann to study the problem of the frontier between French

to a long meditation on his part, particularly on the condition of Jewish as well as of other workers, before his reading a French translation of Zangwill's *Chad Gadya*. The story itself is that of a Venetian "de-Judaized" Jew who, after a long absence, returns to his home during a Passover celebration. Seating himself as his father chants the *Chad Gadya*, and very much aware of what his father thinks of him, he begins to reflect and to question his own life and values. Not believing in God, but touched by his father's religious faith, he finds himself in an intellectual and spiritual dilemma. Conscious of the failure and absurdity of his estrangement in a world of tormentors, he is simultaneously aware of his inability to identify himself completely with his Jewish brethren. Before the end of the Seder, he leaves the room, goes outside, and commits suicide in the waters of the canal, murmuring, as he dies, the words "Hear, O Israel!" These last few words, incidentally, represent the title of a poem by Spire, the last line of which ends with the words, "to arms"!

The celebration of Passover, incidentally, is the centerpiece of many French and other novels, and the frequent reference to it as a theme in literature is no doubt due to the fact that the Jew is always more or less a stranger in society. It is also a measure of the meaning of Jewish alienation. Viewed more broadly, it provides a universal metaphor for the relationship between torturers and their victims, oppressors and the liberated.

In any case, *Chad Gadya* resulted in a kind of religious "conversion" in the heart and mind of Spire, as he himself relates in his *Quelques Juifs*, I. His whole Jewish heredity was reawakened, and his bond with the past and present suffering of his coreligionists was deepened significantly. In a word, out of his spiritual shock, as several critics have correctly indicated, came his *Poèmes Juifs* (Jewish Poems), first published in 1908, with a later edition in 1919, and yet another, definitive edition, published in 1959, in whose Preface Spire describes what they meant to him (p.24). He writes that these poems "attempt to express the reaction (i.e., his own) to the modern world of a man who holds perhaps not a single truly Jewish belief, but who, born of Jewish parents, is descended from a long line of French Jews. . ."⁴ It was no accident, therefore, that after his reading of *Chad Gadya*, Spire became a zealous student of all that related to Judaism, and drew on the Bible, especially texts from Job, Jeremiah, Isaiah, as well as the Talmud, the Midrash, and the Zohar. This fact can clearly be seen

Syria and Palestine. Interesting and important biographical details concerning Spire can also be found in Spire's *Souvenirs à bâtons rompus* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1962), pp. 35ff. 4. Even though Spire has declared himself as both atheist and pantheist, Ludmilla Savitsky, in her "A travers la Pensée et l'oeuvre d'André Spire," *Les Feuilles Libres* (July 1920), p.312, calls him an "esprit religieux en son essence même" (essentially a religious soul). Renée Aberdam, in "Les grands thèmes lyriques," in *Hommage à André Spire* (Paris: Lipschutz, 1939), p.61, also refers to his "âme profondément religieuse" (profoundly religious soul).

in the epigraphs that appear at the head of many of his poems and even at the head of the different acts in *Samaël*.

In any event, what must be stressed in connection with his "conversion" resulting from his reading of *Chad Gadya* is that, fundamentally, much like his family's race-consciousness which had taken the place of religious consciousness, Spire became a militant Jew and revolted against all manifestations of anti-Semitism, which he equated with injustice and inequality. Like the child who is instinctively proud of his parents and offended by any insult to them, Spire reveals a fierce ethnic pride as he calls to mind the many persecutions inflicted on Jews throughout history.

II

If Spire, in his impetuous and combative attachment to, and identification with, the Jewish people, betrays elements of the romantic, he also gives evidence of being a realist who sees the world as it is. Fully aware of the different aspects of a pervasive anti-Semitism, and having experienced it himself, he offers to the Jew concrete observations and suggestions as he assumes the role of the moralist in several of his poems. In "*Exode*" (Exodus), for example, he tells his fellow Jews that they must "leave these alien lands where [they] are staying," lands which he characterizes as "soils of servitude," and exhorts them to follow the chiefs of their tribes who have "found new promised lands, new Canaans." By so doing, he adds, such Jews will see their pride "rising up reawakened." His poem, "*Pogromes*" (Pogroms), becomes an outspoken condemnation of the ingratitude of all those countries — France included — who ask Jewish sons "to take up arms and to kill." Bitterly, he affirms, in return for their sacrifice and patriotism they "will only be slaughtered." Spire's feelings regarding the Jews, as they are expressed in these poems, stand out in bold relief when read together with his other poem, "*A la France*" (To France), in which he ecstatically glorifies the air, rivers, and beauty of France. He reveals his passionate love for France as he describes its "sleeping streams," its vineyards. Last, but not least, he extols the beauty of the French language, which "shapes [his] soul," and he even makes reference to its "café-concerts" and theatres.

Though French to the marrow of his bones, Spire adopts France's "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," not simply as an empty slogan, but as a meaningful part of an equation that, for him, finds its counterpart in the Bible: the treatment of the stranger. In this connection, it is to be noted that Leviticus (19:33-34) states that "if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the homeborn among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself . . ." Dr. J.H. Hertz, in his edition of the Pentateuch, comments on this Biblical injunction and underlines the fact that the "duty of loving the stranger is stressed thirty-six times in Scripture and is placed

on the same level as the duty of kindness to, and protection of, the widow and the orphan." "The alien", he adds, "was to be protected simply *because he was a human being*."

Indeed, basic to Spire's world-view — applied to both Jew and non-Jew — is his notion of equality and justice. Repeating and emphasizing everywhere his categorical demand for justice, one that is akin to that of the Prophets, he bemoans what he regards as an existing evil in France. Despite the fact that, in its Rights of Man, France had declared that equality is to be granted to all French citizens, Spire sees French Jews being treated as strangers and as second-class citizens. In his discussion of this fact, it becomes quite clear to him why, from a psychological point of view, Jews experience the feeling of having committed some kind of crime; internalizing these feelings, they question themselves and wonder whether they have been sufficiently conformist, and even begin to suspect that there is something in their looks or mannerisms that accounts for their exclusion from the mainstream of French life. For all their attempts to be discreet and modest, he adds, they are still being accused of being "sly." Not accepted like other Frenchmen, they react, suggests Spire, like any human being who, deemed by others ugly, blushes out of a feeling of shame, and ends up by cursing those who brought him into the world. It is understandable, therefore, according to Spire, that from this perspective Jews would also become creatures of self-hatred.

As Spire continues this train of thought, he raises rhetorically the question whether Heine, Börne, Bartholdi, Disraeli, and others, would have been able to achieve their distinction if they had not been required to subject themselves to the religious rite of baptism. The conclusion of his reflection is that the Jews are a "people of dupes." Explaining himself, he says that when Jews are asked to participate, like any other group, in an activity that involves proof of loyalty to their country, they do so; in return, however, the more-than-frequent result is that they are then asked to leave the country of their adoption. Their sacrifice, therefore, has been for others, and in vain, since in no way have they been regarded as equal human beings.⁵

III

Clearly, Spire's more significant pronouncements on Jewish questions that also reflect his own Jewish identity are to be found in his prose writings rather than in his poetry. Developing a kind of Jewish ontology, he repudiates the thesis later expressed by Sartre in his *Anti-Semitism and the Jew*, according to which the Jew is defined only as he sees himself mirrored in the eyes of the non-Jew. In a series of literary portraits, to be found in his *Quelque Juifs et demi-Juifs*, he includes European pro-Jewish, anti-Jewish, and "half-Jewish" writers, and delineates notions of positive

5. This entire discussion is taken from *QJ* II, pp. 164-169.

and negative identification with regard to Jewishness. This exploration of identification, needless to say, also involves a study of the feeling of self-hatred. The portraits themselves include Proust, Gabriel Marcel, James Darmesteter, Henri Franck, Otokar Fischer, and others. Relatively few of them, with the possible exception of Zangwill, are seen by Spire as authentic, credible, or convincing Jews. It goes without saying that behind these portraits one finds Spire's obsessive search for his own Jewish identification as well as that of others. But of all these portraits, the one that stands out as revealing Jewish self-hatred at its worst, is that of Otto Weininger (1880-1903).

This German scientist and philosopher asserts, in his doctoral thesis *Sex and Character*, that there exists a relationship between sex and race. Hence, he distinguishes between what he calls masculinity and femininity, and characterizes the Jews as weak, passive and "feminine," denying them, therefore, any ontological reality, individuality or spirituality. Unable to define the Jews as a people, he finds them, like women, worthless.⁶ Spire, who refutes all of these contentions, offers several striking examples and arguments which reveal Jewish spirituality and heroic resistance against all those who had persecuted them.⁷

One can understand why Spire brands Weininger a "coward," as one who is ashamed of being a Jew, and who is unwilling or afraid to struggle (*QJ*, II, 185). Spire is furthermore convinced that Weininger's conversion, in 1902, to Protestantism, did not, in the end, help him gain the acceptance by the Christians which he desired. Generalizing on this idea, Spire states that, even after conversion, Christians still taunt the Jews by saying: "Uncurl your hair, modify your accent, change your face" (*QJ*, II, 196). In his poem, "*Assimilation*," Spire satirizes with much irony the servile attempt of those Jews who do everything possible to look like the Gentiles.

IV

Although Spire was convinced that Man was evil and that he gave sufficient evidence of irrationality, he nevertheless did not accept the nihilist pessimism of a Kafka or, for that matter, of Ecclesiastes. Because life itself, as he viewed it, was sacred and beautiful, he desired to change Man by

6. It may be of interest to the reader in this connection to know that a play entitled "Soul of a Jew: The Last Night of Otto Weininger" was performed at Symphony Space in New York by the Haifa Municipal Theatre of Israel, Nov. 2-6, 1988. This play chronicles the life of Weininger and revolves around his struggle with his Jewishness.

7. It should be noted, incidentally, in connection with Weininger's label of Jewish "femininity," that some twentieth-century critics reproach modern Judaism for not being capable of coming to terms with woman and feminism, claiming that older, Biblical, rabbinic, and medieval images continue to thrive as they draw on the legend of the threatening power of Lilith as the mythical female demon. A more progressive feminist view, however, espoused by Aviva Cantor, sees in women's revolt a claim for equality that is based on her strength of character. See "The Lilith Question," in Susanna Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (New York: Schocken), p. 41

underlining the inalienable dignity of each human being, and by giving importance to universal brotherhood. To achieve this aim, however, as Spire realized, requires an understanding of the realities of the world and of society. To overcome man's natural inclinations toward evil, and his propensities for causing suffering to others, he therefore stressed the needed role of effort, energy, risk, struggle, and courage. This notion, which becomes the last stage in Spire's spiritual and intellectual odyssey as Jew, Frenchman, and human being, is explored in his three-act philosophic, cosmic, and dramatic poem, *Samaël*.⁸

Forward looking, positive, and optimistic himself, Spire here treats the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and its consequences become a metaphor for human decision, freedom of choice, and responsibility. To understand its significance, Spire introduces Samaël, a rebel against God, who, after the expulsion of the first human pair, attempts to instill in them a feeling of nostalgia for their past surroundings and former blissful way of life. The poet next shows Adam's family struggling forcefully and idealistically against the evil forces in society, indicating at the same time that the human family will never consent to collective suicide. Life, as Spire implies, is to be lived untiringly and courageously. From this point of view, it is nostalgia for the past, passivity, and aversion to struggle that Spire sees as the real Sin. Again, one is here reminded of the demand in Genesis, Chapter XII, that Abram leave his country in order to go "unto that land that I (i.e., the Lord) will show thee." One can extrapolate from this verse, with a certain logic, the notion, too, that one should not look back. Looking forward, indeed, represents a dramatic break with the past. Life itself thus involves a complete severance from the past. What is needed, therefore, as one can infer from the expulsion, is a vitality and willingness to struggle, which is found in the robust joy of life in one's present and future surroundings. Such an approach seems to be the message which Spire applies particularly to the Jew, as well as to humanity at large. Despite, therefore, Spire's apparent despair of man, he expresses in *Samaël* a note of hope and a vision for the future. Otokar Fischer, as quoted by Burnshaw, sees in *Samaël* only a "virile pathos,"⁹ reminding one of the French poem, "*La Mort du Loup*," by Alfred de Vigny, which shows the stoic attitude, in his last moments, of a dying wolf who, though suffering much, dies silently and without uttering a cry. But for Spire, it is clear, life is not a tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. On the contrary, for him life has significance and meaning with an existential dimension. In a word, the Jew, like the rest of humanity, is defined by his own choices and sense of responsibility.

8. This dramatic poem was broadcast by the French National Broadcasting System on Dec. 5, 1953.

9. Burnshaw, *Op. cit.*, p.70

V

In sum, Spire understood the need and significance of belonging, that human beings cannot live in isolation, and that they require roots in history, tradition, soil, and place. Human connectiveness implied for him values of family, community, and groups, ethnic or otherwise. He also realized that irrational prejudice and unjustified and gratuitous hostility prevent human fellowship and brotherhood. Champion of the weak and oppressed, he thus turned his social passions into ideas and action that reflected loyalty to humanity. And just as he defended the underprivileged and disinherited, he also wanted to uphold the rights of Jews as the socially and legally deprived of all times. Aware of the injustices visited on Jews throughout history, and of the fact that Jews had lost their land, their history and language, he saw realistically the need of a Jewish homeland and, therefore, advanced the cause of Zionism. He shared, moreover, Judaic values that were deeply rooted within the framework of social and ethical consciousness. His identification with Jews reflected his inner revolt against the alienation, estrangement, and persecution to which Jews had constantly been subjected. The key to his life and thinking is to be found in his vision of equality applied to all. And never caught *between* two cultures, his loyalties to both France and Judaism reflect one and the same ideal, that of 1789! This ideal is given expression in a statement quoted by him, in obvious approval, of Joseph Salvador (1796-1873), who said, "the Jewish people . . . is the only one that has preserved, in all its purity, the notion of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" (*QJ*, 244).

He championed pride in one's Jewish identity as a moral cause, and possessing, himself, integrity of character and authenticity in his being, Spire urged his Jewish brethren to be themselves, without concern for how they were being regarded by the Christian world. Raising the banner of pride in his poem, "Exodus," he refers to the need of Jewish *fierté* (vital self-esteem). For this reason, he also had contempt for those Jews who, out of cowardice, fear, ambition, or desire for fame, manifested self-hatred. Those Jews, in particular, who deny their origins, or, in their attempted flight from their origins, reveal shame or hatred for their fellow-Jews, he regards as the quintessence of inauthenticity. Such Jews, as he implies, belong nowhere. Not accepted like others by Christians, they are neither Jews nor Christians. Emptied of all sense of pride and authenticity, they dissociate themselves from all that has given meaning to their Jewish existence as they embrace, actually or implicitly, a master-slave relationship. Destroying the reality of their existence as born Jews, they encourage, as Spire asserts, this kind of relationship by submitting themselves to the role of slaves who have no control over their own fate.

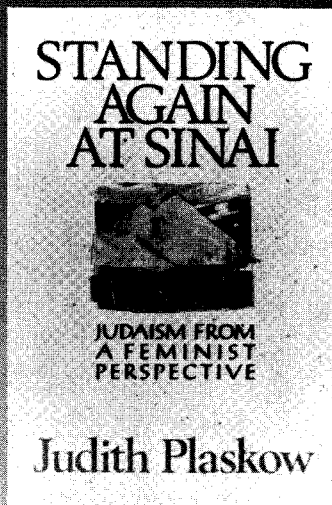
In a word, maintaining identity of the self requires that it not be fractured or fragmented. Its existence cannot survive the "exile" of any vital part of itself. It is, thus, imperative that this "exiled part" be restored to

itself in order to give its spiritual life identity, meaning and significance. From this psychological perspective one can justly assert that the Jew, as mirrored in the life and ideals of Spire, can be at one with himself, in complete harmony, without any conflict, both as a Jew and as an equal member of the human race. Like Spire, the Jew has only to "love his neighbor as himself." This implies that one's acceptance of oneself as Jew is an expression of self-esteem and that, contrary to being an impediment, it leads naturally to love for the country in which one is born. Cowardice or self-delusion, when present, may perhaps result in a form of Jewish physical survival; but one's identity as a Jew living in the Diaspora can find its fullest human expression only in a courageous display of self-pride.

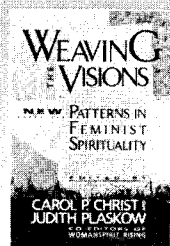
In the end, Spire's "conversion," to which we referred earlier, was the result not only of his awareness of the harsh realities of anti-Semitism, but also because of a sense of pride in his Jewish identity. It was because of this pride that he later developed an understanding and knowledge of his heritage and his people's destiny. His feeling of belonging to a Jewish collective identity required that he study and become familiar with Jewish history, customs and traditions, and even, to a small degree, with its language. In so doing, he certainly did not ignore the importance of the Jewish contribution to world civilization. Even if Jewishness, as he implied, had essentially ethnic rather than religious values, it nevertheless asserted its ethnic pride as a unique affirmation of human existence. To give meaning and significance to this human ethnic feeling, one must first acquire, as he implied in his life and writings, an adequate knowledge of one's past, one's traditions and culture. Spire's identification both as Jew and Frenchman may well serve as a viable alternative to those who have opted to surrender their Jewish souls.

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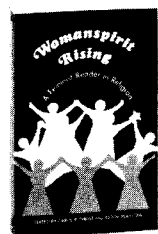
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REVIEWS

Galut: Modern Jewish Reflection on Homelessness and Homecoming. By ARNOLD EISEN. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. xx + 233 pp.

Reviewed by DAVID BIALE

WITH THE RECENT mass exodus of Soviet Jews to Israel, the seemingly tired Zionist ideology of the primacy of Israel over the Diaspora suddenly took on new life. From the Israeli side, it appeared as if the ideological tenets of Zionism were once again confirmed: the Diaspora is exile, and anti-Semitism must inevitably lead to *aliyah*. By failing to oppose the new American quotas on Soviet immigration and thus making it virtually inevitable that the Soviet Jews would go to Israel, the American Jewish establishment seemed to accept this Zionist analysis. Moreover, by adopting the role of the philanthropists of the Soviet *aliyah*, the American Jewish community confirmed for itself the purely instrumental role that Zionists had assigned to it.

Yet, the very terms of this mass emigration do not so much confirm Zionist ideology as raise old and recurrent questions about it. For, given free emigration, the Soviet Jews would undoubtedly have opted for America in massive numbers and would have therefore raised anew the major challenge to Zionism of the last hundred years: whether or not America is *galut*, it has remained the most attractive option for the greatest number of Jews, including many Israelis.

It is precisely this tension between the homecoming of the Jews to political sovereignty in Israel

and the less ideological and political embrace of America as home that is the subject of Arnold Eisen's very timely and eloquently-written book. Like a number of other historical studies written by American Jewish scholars in the last several years (including my own *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*), Eisen writes out of personal engagement, and his book is an attempt to reflect from a scholarly point of view on pressing existential issues. Raised and educated in America, he completed his Ph.D. at the Hebrew University, returned to teach at Columbia University, but then moved back to Israel to teach at Tel Aviv University. For the last several years professor of religious studies at Stanford University, his personal odyssey between America and Israel represents the conflicted commitments of many American Jewish intellectuals. Because he has lived critically in both worlds, he is unable to accept the simple-minded ideological verities of either, and his book is a nuanced attempt to move the discussion beyond the usual clichés.

The structure of the book is unusual, not to say surprising. Anyone in search of a systematic and comprehensive exploration of the treatment of *galut* in the history of Jewish thought would do well to look elsewhere, for Eisen makes no pretense of offering such a history. The medieval and early modern literature is almost totally lacking, and his treatment of the vast rabbinic literature is deliberately limited to just the talmudic tractate, *Avodah Zarah*. Only for the modern period does he present a rather full analysis of thinkers, especially from the Zionist movement. This comprehensive history of the modern concept of Jewish exile is of considerable value in its own right, but Eisen does not intend it to stand alone. Rather, it

DAVID BIALE is Koret professor of Jewish history and Director of the Center for Jewish Studies of Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley.

must be taken together with the first part of the book, which treats the concept of *galut* in three classical texts: Genesis, Deuteronomy and *Avodah Zarah*. This first section is, to my mind, the best and most exciting part of the book, for it offers a kind of midrash on the classical concepts of exile. If I have read him correctly, Eisen wishes to show here that while the various Zionists and their diaspora opponents are indebted to different elements from the tradition, all have failed to understand the nuanced tensions that the tradition as a whole has to offer. He puts it like this:

My own suggestion ... is that we see the inherited conceptions of exile and homecoming whole rather than in the fragments usually invoked by one side or the other, Center or diaspora, to justify its particular outlook. Jewish tradition and Jewish history are what Israel and American Jewry have in common.

Rather than confirming this or that ideology, the tradition in its entirety subverts the absolute claims of its modern interpreters.

By taking the three "moments" of Genesis, Deuteronomy and *Avodah Zarah* as representatives of different poles of the tradition, Eisen shows that the classical sources offer a way of understanding our own situation as located somewhere on the continuum between absolute exile and absolute redemption. Just as America is not exile in the pure abstract sense, nor is Israel a full, unambiguous homecoming, so the tradition suggests equivocal meanings of *galut*. The Book of Genesis begins with the metaphysical exile from paradise, an exile that cannot be resolved by a mere return to political sovereignty. All human beings are in an existential state of exile that

no geographical or political relocation can redeem. The stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs are informed by this sense of exile, for although they wander in the land that is promised to them, they are "not yet at home" (Eisen offers a very subtle and intriguing reading of the sister-wife stories of Genesis 12, 20 and 26 in which the political and sexual consequences of exile are intermingled).

As opposed to Genesis, Deuteronomy suggests a very different sense of homecoming, by celebrating the concrete blessings of the land. Here, Eisen argues, is a concept of exile and return that, while perhaps utopian, is geographical and political as against the metaphysics of the Garden of Eden story. The Deuteronomic promise is perhaps the foreshadowing of Zionism, yet here, too, there is ambiguity. The return to the land requires adherence to the covenant, and exile will be the punishment for transgression. Home is associated with a sacred order, not with Zionist "normalcy," and the homecoming can never be secure as long as the very human possibility for transgression exists.

The rabbinic discussion of idolatry is the third "moment" in Eisen's classical triptych. The Mishnah and Gemarah in *Avodah Zarah* represent strategies for living with idolators both inside and outside the Land of Israel. Here we find both the desire to segregate the Jews from the pollution of idolatry, but also significant compromises, inevitable in a real world that the rabbis were powerless to change (the story of Rabban Gamliel in the bath with a statue of Aphrodite is perhaps the most dramatic instance of such compromises). Above all, the rabbis subtly erased some of the distinctions between the Land and exile. Eisen argues that

the combination of memory and neglect . . . made of the Land both a center of aspiration and a periphery to actual existence. Had the rabbis not preserved the memory of the real, physical Land and insisted upon its centrality, they would have been unable to orient Jews in the unbounded time and space of their many dispersions. But by doing so, by identifying homecoming with the sacred order of Torah, they acted to mitigate the Land's centrality.

One might argue that this delicate strategy has been thoroughly destroyed in modern times by both the secularization of the Jews and the creation of the State of Israel. On the one hand, most Jews of the Diaspora no longer find a home in the Torah, except in the most attenuated sense. On the other, with the creation of the second largest Jewish community in the Land itself, Zionism has made the Land no longer a memory, but, now, a reality. Yet, while Zionism has radically changed the status of the Land, it has failed to alter the rabbinic tension: for most secular Jews in the Western Diaspora, the State of Israel continues to be "a center of aspiration and a periphery to actual existence." Ironically, it is only the Orthodox, who continue to identify "homecoming with the sacred order of Torah," who freely choose life in the Jewish state in significant numbers. Here, then, is the final insult to the ideology of secular Zionism.

What Eisen has succeeded in doing, by framing the contemporary debates in terms of the classical tradition, is to show how the black and white dichotomies of contemporary discourse have already been anticipated in much

more ambiguous form in the tradition. In a non-Messianic world, Israel can fulfill only part of the Biblical promise of homecoming, but it cannot solve the metaphysical problem of exile, nor can it ever satisfy the moral imperative of Deuteronomy. The American Diaspora, for its part, may be different from other exiles, but its uniqueness is already anticipated in the compromises suggested by *Avodah Zarah*. In light of the complexities posed by the tradition, Israel and America are less diametric poles apart than different stations on a continuum. The history of Jewish thought, in Eisen's hands, deconstructs the certainties of contemporary ideologies.

Indeed, Eisen's meditation makes one wonder whether the whole ideological debate between Israel and the Diaspora should not be relegated to the museum of intellectual history. Aḥad Ha-Am, Hess, Klatzkin, Herzl, and all the other thinkers who articulated the Zionist position, all predated the reality of the State. For any contemporary Jew — from Israel or the Diaspora — who has lived in both worlds, as Eisen and this writer have, ideology pales in the face of the quotidian fabric of life. It is the subjective and personal, rather than the ideological, that determines where such Jews choose to live. The factories of ideology will continue, of course, to churn out their stale products, but they will be increasingly irrelevant. The Diaspora may, indeed, be a neurotic solution, as the Israeli novelist A.B. Yehoshua repeatedly proclaims, but his very obsession with conveying this message to the Diaspora begins to look suspiciously like its own form of neurosis in a post-ideological age.

Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History. By DAVID BIALE. New York: Schocken Books, 1986. 224 pp., \$18.95.

Reviewed by ARNOLD EISEN

DAVID BIALE'S fine meditation on the Jewish people's ability to "control its relations to other peoples as well as its own internal political, cultural, religious, economic and social life" makes for gripping, if frustrating reading — particularly where I sit this year, in Jerusalem. Gripping: because the dilemmas addressed by the book are as current as the day's headlines. Frustrating: because outworn ideologies, belied by headlines and history alike, are still pervasive in both political oratory and ordinary conversation. It is as if the need for simple mythic polarities like diaspora powerlessness versus Israeli power only increases as the facts on the ground become more perplexing. One wishes that Biale's appeal for attention to irony and complexity were more widely heard, and that the lessons of this thoughtful book might be the subject for widespread argument and debate.

Consider the historical ironies evinced by Jewish history in its formative periods. Israelite monarchs, Biale reminds us, were perpetually caught between a rock and a hard place. If they made common cause with one of the regional powers at the other's expense, the price to be paid was heavy; if they sought independence from both — except at moments of imperial weakness — the result was no less disastrous. The Deuteronomist historians, like the prophets, of course had their own recommendations concerning this

predicament, but their testimony only adds to other evidence pointing to severely limited national options and ephemeral royal power. "For the most part," Biale summarizes, "the lot of the Jews under the great powers was not different from that of other subject nations." Moreover, "in terms of political rights, there was very little difference between the Jews of Palestine and those of the Diaspora, which originated in Babylonian times and spread throughout the Mediterranean under the Greeks and Romans." Add to this the further paradox that "the revolts which occasioned the destruction of the first and second Temples led in both cases to 'more reasonable and effective Jewish leaders.'" Indeed, "the internal autonomy wielded by the rabbis" after 70 c.e. "exceeded in many respects that of earlier periods." The simple equation of land with power, exile (or diaspora) with powerlessness, argues Biale, cannot stand up to scrutiny. One has to look more closely.

This Biale does in subsequent chapters, examining first the political theories which guided and reflected Jewish behavior, and then the considerable corporate power and political activism exhibited by Jewish communities during the Middle Ages. Biale does not minimize the Jews' subjection to local or distant lords. But, like Salo Baron before him, he strives mightily to dispel the picture of Jewish medieval life as one long tale of "suffering and learning." Hence the emphasis upon the "considerable influence in high governing circles" and the significant degree of control over day-to-day life enjoyed by many pre-modern Jewish communities. Hence, too, the attention to "the very active political struggles" within those communities. Normalization of Jewish political life, in this sense at least, did

ARNOLD EISEN is Associate professor of religious studies and Aaron-Roland Fellow at Stanford University.

not have to wait for the rise of Zionism.

The modern ground covered in the remainder of the book is more familiar. Unprecedented conditions and opportunities called forth ideologies, tactics and modes of leadership never before in evidence among Jews. Biale's survey shows that the concept of historical powerlessness evoked by various modern Jewish thinkers long before the rise of Zionism went hand in hand with the ideology of emancipation. "It corresponded neatly to the experience of the absolutist regimes under which they lived," the de-legitimation of *corporate* forms of Jewish political life, serving the call for acceptance of the new, *individualist* order. The new sorts of political theory and activity developed since Emancipation came to an end in Central and Eastern Europe at the hands of the Nazis, but not before one of them — Zionism — had led to the achievement of national sovereignty. Biale urges that we not regard the Holocaust as the "continuation, if in a much more extreme form, of previous Jewish history . . . Superficial similarities between the ghettos of the Holocaust and the communities of the Middle Ages should not mislead us." Likewise,

the relevant question is not why the European Jews did not resist more or whether there is something in Jewish history that prevented resistance . . . The Jews of the Holocaust, rather than representing the culmination of a history of passivity, are rather a symbol of the helplessness of the individual in the face of the modern state gone mad.

The book's final chapters survey the "quest for Jewish power" in the reborn Jewish state and in America. While continuities with previous diaspora situations are appar-

ent, Biale argues convincingly that Jewish power in America is unprecedented in that it occurs within the context of a pluralist democracy and against the backdrop of a sovereign Jewish state. The situation of modern Israel, paradoxically, "strikingly resembles the dilemmas of ancient Israel, caught between the great imperial powers of that distant age." In this respect, Biale concludes, "those who see Zionism as a continuation of Jewish history, rather than a revolutionary escape from it, may well be right."

One could, of course, marshal evidence to the contrary, and Biale — in a less polemical mode — might readily accept it. But consider for a moment these testimonies to continuity and paradox, garnered from today's newspapers. First, as I write, Israel is without a government because its political parties cannot agree on the proper reaction to a plan for negotiation with Palestinians that was proposed — not without considerable pressure — by Israel's principal ally, patron, protector, and creditor. Sovereign power is not negligible, clearly, but neither is it absolute. Second: a group of visiting American senators, one of them a Jew, is engaged in the delicate task of probing Israel's willingness to adopt the American plan. All of the senators are aware that pressure must be brought to bear discreetly — in part because of Jewish constituents and contributors in their home states. The Jewish senator, one suspects, is not unaware that his position is more delicate still because, willingly or not, he is seen to be an advocate of Jewish interests in Washington and of government policy in the Jewish community. He stands as a symbol, to Jews and Gentiles alike, of how open America has been to Jews, visible evidence of Biale's verdict that "the very success of American

Jews in entering the power structure in America has both strengthened and weakened their ability — and desire — to act as a collectivity in the historical sense of the word.” Third: the Labor party, which toppled the previous government several weeks ago, has not been able to form a new one, primarily because the Lubavitcher Rebbe in New York and a prominent Rosh Yeshiva in B’nai Brak have ordered support for the Likud. The latter rabbi — Eliezer Schach — broadcast his views live to the nation several weeks ago over TV and radio (with periodic interruptions for basketball coverage), and his speech was replete with themes of diaspora political thought. By contrast, the looming events and putative lessons of Holocaust and Statehood were virtually ignored. “Hastening the end” and “provoking the goyim” featured prominently in his lexicon; power, sovereignty, normalization did not.

Schach’s message points to the only major quibble that I have with Biale’s book: the lack of attention to the unavoidably *religious* dimension of Jewish reflection on power and powerlessness. For all that I, too, seek to understand Jewish faith against the background of political and social conditions, I do not believe that a historian can accurately say, point blank, that “the doctrine of the Chosen People was probably developed to justify the Israelite invasion of the land of Canaan in the time of Joshua and the Judges.” The Biblical view of election is too multi-layered for that, too wrapped up in a host of vary-

ing religious consciousnesses. For the same reason, one cannot aver that the Biblical “ideology of divine election” contains an “implicit demand for full Jewish sovereignty,” later transformed by the rabbis “into a more realistic theory of Jewish power.” Zionist ideologists might read the Bible in that fashion, but I do not; for prophets and rabbis alike, more was at stake than power — above all, the service of the Power, Who stands above all. Nor would I agree that, according to Maimonides’ view of messianism, “Jewish political power would be restored to a sovereign state, but would not be drastically transformed.” For the Rambam envisions nothing less than a state of Torah. My point is that all such judgments omit reference to constitutive Jewish belief in (and experience of) the commanding God who chose Jews to carry out His purposes, protected them during the long exile which He ordained, and would some day restore them to a reign of Torah protected by His providence from external incursion. God, in short, was a major player in the drama of Jewish power and powerlessness in which Jews understood themselves to be acting. The historian must give that Power His due, because the subjects of Jewish history did so without pause. Here, “traditional Jewish memory” and “historical criticism” — contrasted in the book — come together forcefully. Both point to recurring paradoxes which contemporary ideologists are all too happy to ignore. Biale’s study will make it harder for them to do so — a major contribution.

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Dr. Biale Demurs

TO THE EDITOR:

In her article, "'Out of the Ghetto': Integrating the Study of Jewish Women into the Study of 'The Jews,'" Shulamit Magnus attacked an article of mine on "Childhood, Marriage and the Family in the Eastern European Enlightenment" as reflecting a thoroughly sexist, male perspective. Since her remarks constitute nothing short of a tendentious distortion of both this article and my position, I feel compelled to reply.

I am entirely in sympathy with Dr. Magnus' desire to integrate women's history into Jewish history and am perplexed that she chose me, one of the few such male historians, as a target of her wrath. The article in question, however, does not purport either implicitly or explicitly to be about the experience of women. On the contrary, I make it clear that I am concerned with the way in which a group of *male* literati translated their own experiences into an ideology, that of the Jewish enlightenment.

Indeed, I was so conscious of the male orientation of the sources, that I inserted a paragraph in which I speculated on the experience of the wives of the young *maskilim*. This paragraph begins: "As the memoirs we have been discussing were all written by men, we might wonder about the experience of the young wives, caught between their parents and their new husbands." I refer to the Pauline Wengeroff memoir and suggest that "the problems of growing up in such a family situation were perhaps as difficult for girls as for boys." Yet, the reader of Magnus' article would never even guess that such a paragraph existed.

Magnus does refer to one sentence in that paragraph, without the slightest acknowledgement of the context. It is in connection with the case of a young girl who is evidently seduced by her father-in-law, a case that I bring to support the above contention that the experience of the girls may have been as difficult as that of the boys. I report, based on the

text, that "she is disconsolate at leaving her family and lonely in the unfamiliar rural setting." Hardly what you might expect from someone insensitive to the feelings of women! I would concede that describing this case as a "racy tale" was infelicitous (I intended it in the sense of a "scandalous tale"), but a close reading of the responsum certainly does not support her hasty conclusion that this was a straightforward case of sexual molestation. If she had checked the original, she would have found the following:

Her mother-in-law spoke to her husband (i.e., the girl's father-in-law) and urged him to befriend her so that she would forget her concerns and he began to befriend her and walked with her a number of times in the forest that was there. The young wife related this to her husband and said that his father had played with her and kissed her. He (i.e., her husband) told her not to go walking with him. *But she did not listen to her husband's words and continued to walk with her father-in-law as before.* The husband witnessed this and also saw how in his house the father-in-law continued to talk with her to the point where the husband thought perhaps they had actually done the deed, God forbid . . . (*Divrei Hayyim*, Q. 29, pp. 96-97, emphasis added).

Rather than a simple instance of sexual coercion, we are presented here with a complex family dynamic in which the girl's difficult marital situation causes her to consent to advances by her father-in-law. However one interprets this interaction, the case supports my claim that girls may have found traditional marriage arrangements as difficult as boys. But by objecting to one word, Dr. Magnus has obliterated the context of the entire paragraph.

She also condemns me for allegedly only seeing the boy's side in a case of an eighteenth-century *agunah*. Again, she ignores the context in which I bring the text. The point here was to show how adolescent rebellion remained an indi-

vidual matter before the Haskalah and typically took the form of disappearance. It is the boy who runs away and not the girl: rebellion remains, as far as our sources tell us, largely a male prerogative (if she has a similar case about a woman, I would be interested to hear it). Hence, the boy is, of necessity, the subject of the discussion. To focus on his response in the stated context does not in and of itself denigrate the girl's. An investigation of *agunot* is certainly a worthy subject, but it was not my subject.

Magnus' failure to put arguments in their explicit context caused her to miss the major conclusions of my article as a whole, namely that the *maskilim* could not arrive at a mature view of women and sexuality and, therefore, created distorted images of both marriage and the family. I show how they try to create a Jewish version of the bourgeois family in which women have less power from what they perceive them to have

in traditional society. I should think that a feminist historian would find these conclusions of some value. But, again, her readers would not have a clue that my article contained such suggestions.

Beyond Dr. Magnus' distortions of my work and *ad hominem* attack on me, there loom larger historiographical questions. The laudable goal of understanding the experience of women can be attained without destroying the historiography of movements that were, whether we like it or not, exclusively male. It is legitimate and important to include the experience of women in such histories if the sources allow it. But to affirm the importance of writing from the point of view of women must not exclude understanding the point of view of men when the subjects are men. Whatever men have done to women over the ages, they still remain, like women, half of history.

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